

# **Religion, Intolerance, and Social Identity**

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## **Declaration**

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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## **Abstract**

Over the past few decades the secular world has witnessed an increasing assault, specifically from the monotheistic religious fundamentalist community, on their beliefs and values. The undeniable intolerance shown by the religious fundamentalist community has often translated into violent terrorist attacks against the secular world. The fact that religious beings can resort to such atrocious acts of violence has certainly baffled many onlookers. It surely comes as no surprise that religious fundamentalism is generally viewed as a ‘hard-to-understand’ phenomenon. This literature review will describe the ‘hard-to-understand’ phenomenon that is religious fundamentalism by employing social identity theory.

The social identity of religious fundamentalists is generally derived from sacred texts and what they consider to be absolute truths. These presumed absolute truths not only provide ample opportunity for the development of the ‘us’/‘them’ duality, but also provide a platform for an intense intolerance of the ‘other’, also referred to as the out-group. Of course, the ‘us’/‘them’ duality can be created on many social dimensions, but religion has proven to bring quite an extensive, even murderous, intolerance to in- and out-group characterizations. The ever increasing actions of religious fundamentalist groups over the past few decades have certainly illustrated this point with some conviction.

The importance of social identity has been recognised in many major traditions of the social sciences, not excluding political science. Social identity forms the basis of any group’s actions or reactions. Therefore, its significance stretches far beyond simply providing an identity to a social group. Social identity also acts as a preamble to how a social group, in this case religious fundamentalists, chooses to deal with invidious comparisons. By employing social identity in this particular way we can go beyond investigating how religious fundamentalists act and react to the point of understanding *why* they act and react the way they do. In this study it was found that although a number of options to deal with invidious comparisons are available to social groups, only a few of these options are likely to be pursued by religious fundamentalists in order to remain a

relevant and competitive social group within the social hierarchy. This approach will provide important insights into a formerly ‘hard-to-understand’ phenomenon namely religious fundamentalism.

## Opsomming

Oor die laaste paar dekades het die sekulêre wêreld 'n toenemende aanslag op sy oortuigings en waardes waargeneem, spesifiek vanaf die monoteïstiese godsdienstige fundamentalistiese gemeenskap. Die onloënbare onverdraagsaamheid wat deur hierdie godsdienstige fundamentalistiese gemeenskap getoon word ontaard dikwels in gewelddadige terroriste aanvalle op die sekulêre wêreld. Die feit dat godsdienstige individue hulself begwewe tot sulke wreedaardige dade van geweld het verseker baie toeskouers verydel. Dis is sekerlik dan nie 'n verrassing dat godsdienstige fundamentalisme gesien word as 'n 'moelik-om-te-begryp' fenomeen nie. Hierdie literatuur oorsig sal die 'moelik-om-te-begryp' fenomeen wat godsdienstige fundamentalisme is beskryf deur gebruik te maak van die sosiale identiteits teorie.

Die sosiale identiteit van godsdienstige fundamentaliste spruit oor die algemeen uit heilige teks en absolute waarhede. Hierdie absolute waarhede bied nie slegs ruim geleenthede vir die ontwikkeling van die 'ons'/'hulle' dualiteit nie, maar bied ook 'n platform vir 'n intense onverdraagsaamheid van die 'ander', wat ook verwys word na as die buite-groep. Natuurlik kan die 'ons'/'hulle' dualiteit op grond van baie ander sosiale dimensies ontwikkel word, maar godsdiens het telke male al gedemonstreer dat dit 'n omvattende, selfs moordadige, onverdraagsaamheid na binne- en buite-groep karakterisering bring. Die al ewige toenemende aksies van godsdienstige fundamentalistiese groepe oor die laaste paar dekades illustreer sekerlik hierdie punt met oortuiging.

Die belangrikheid van sosiale identiteit word erken deur verskeie tradisies van die sosiale wetenskappe en politieke wetenskap word nie hier uitgesluit nie. Sosiale identiteit vorm die basis van enige groep se aksies en reaksies. Vir hierdie rede strek die betekenisvoheid ver verby die feit dat slegs 'n identiteit aan 'n sosiale groep verskaf word. Sosiale identiteit tree op as 'n voorrede vir die manier waarop 'n sosiale groep, in ons geval godsdienstige fundamentaliste, verkies om onbenydenswaardige vergelykings te hanteer. Deur sosiale identiteit op hierdie besondere manier aan te spreek kan ons verder gaan as om slegs ondersoek in te stel in hoe godsdienstige fundamentaliste optree

en reageer tot die punt waar ons kan verstaan *hoekom* hulle optree en reageer op hierdie spesifieke manier. In hierdie studie is gevind dat alhoewel daar 'n aantal opsies beskikbaar is vir sosiale groepe om onbenydenswaardige vergelykings te hanteer, is daar slegs 'n paar van hierdie opsies wat mees waarskynlik nagestreef sal word deur godsdienstige fundamentaliste ten 'n einde 'n relevante en kompeterende sosiale groep binne die sosial hiërargie te wees. Hierdie benadering sal belangrike insigte bring tot die voormalige 'moeilik-om-te-begryp' fenomeen genaamd godsdienstige fundamentalisme.

## **Acknowledgments**

This thesis could not have been completed without the valuable inputs of Professor du Toit. His extensive knowledge in the field of religion and conflict never failed to impress and inspire. I would like to personally thank him for his willingness, his commitment, and his patience to see this through.

The relations are the ways in which my mind perceives the connections between single entities, but what is the guarantee that this is universal and stable?

- Umberto Eco, 1983



## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1 – Introduction: Monotheistic Religion, Intolerance, and its Impact on Religious Social Groups</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The Unexpected Religious Revival	1
1.2 Claims about Monotheistic Religion and Intolerance	3
1.3 Sacred Texts and Absolute Truths: An Intratextual Model	4
1.4 Religious vs. Secular Ideologies	6
1.5 Research Question and Research Aims	8
1.6 Methodology	9
1.6.1 Delimitations of Study	10
1.6.2 Limitations of Study	12
1.7 Chapter Outline	12
 <b>Chapter 2 – Social Identity Theory: Monotheistic Religion and the Creation of Out-Groups</b>	 <b>16</b>
2.1 The Social Identity Theory	16
2.1.1 Intergroup Competition	21
2.1.2 The Sherif Experiment at Robbers Cave (1954)	23
2.2 Religion and the Creation of In- and Out-Groups	25
2.2.1 Absolute Truth Claims	26
2.2.2 Religious Worldviews: In Pursuit of Utopia	27
2.3 Religious Fundamentalism vs. Non-Fundamentalism	29
2.3.1 Religious Fundamentalists and Social Identity	32
2.3.2 Religious Fundamentalist Militancy	37

## **Chapter 3 – Options for Dealing with Invidious Comparisons** **40**

3.1	Introduction	40
	3.1.2 Social Mobility and Social Change	41
3.2	Individual Mobility	42
	3.2.1 Changes in Religious Affiliation in the United States	47
3.3	Social Creativity	50
	3.3.1 New Dimension of Comparison	51
	3.3.1.1 The Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia	53
	3.3.2 Changing the Rankings	56
	3.3.2.1 Modernise	57
	3.3.2.2 Transforming the Negative to the Positive	61
	3.3.3 Changing the Out-Group	63
	3.3.3.1 Religious Fundamentalists in the United States	64
	3.3.3.2 Creating a Global Collective Consciousness	67
3.4	Social Competition	69
	3.4.1 Congregationalists vs. Anglicans: A Bishop for Colonial America	70
	3.4.2 Virginia: Competing for Political Power	73
3.5	Reactionary Violence	74
	3.5.1 Christian Fundamentalism in the United States	79
3.6	Complete Withdrawal: A Possible Fifth Option	81

## **Chapter 4 – Conclusion** **84**

4.1	Social Identity and Religion	84
4.2	Evaluating the Options	87
	4.2.1 Individual Mobility	87
	4.2.2 Social Creativity	88
	4.2.2.1 New Dimension of Comparison	88
	4.2.2.2 Changing the Rankings	89
	4.2.2.3 Changing the Out-Group	91

4.2.3	Social Competition	92
4.2.4	Reactionary Violence	93
4.2.5	Complete Withdrawal	94
4.3	The Expected Future	95
<b>Bibliography</b>		<b>98</b>
 <b>List of Figures</b>		
Figure 1.1	The Structure of Fundamentalist Thought	4
Figure 1.2	Fundamentalism: Secular Ideology and Religion	7

## **INTRODUCTION:**

# **MONOTHEISTIC RELIGION, INTOLERANCE AND ITS IMPACT ON RELIGIOUS SOCIAL GROUPS**

### **1.1 The Unexpected Religious Revival**

For the beginning of the twentieth century influential sociologists and scholars of political science were generally in agreement that religion would cease to play an important role in our world (Bruce, 2003:2). Sociologists such as Comte, Durkheim, Freud and Weber predicted the complete demise of religion. This idea was taken to heart by many modern social scientists who agreed that “religion had no meaningful role in politics and society” (Fox & Shmuel, 2004:10). However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century it is evident that these very influential social scientists and those who followed in their footsteps were gravely mistaken.

Today we are able to look back on the century that was supposed to bring about the demise of religion and witness a religious revival from the end of the Second World War (1945) onwards. In this period of time the world was not only characterised by an unexpected religious revival but also by an increase in conflicts around the world. Is this simply a coincidence? Research suggests that it is not. Studies, specifically done on civil wars, have found that between 1945 and 1960 half of all civil wars fought were “to some large degree informed by religio-ethnic identity” (Bruce, 2003:2). In the period of 1960 to 1990 this statistic rose to three-quarters (Bruce, 2003:2). By the early 1980s another new phenomena relating to religion had also taken place. Studies done by Weinberg and Eubanks found that in the early 1980s “terrorist activities shifted to a more religious pattern” (Fox & Shmuel, 2004:104). These “terrorist activities” were mostly carried out by religious fundamentalists. The involvement of religious groups in violent attacks

deliberately targeting civilians proved to be both disturbing and perplexing to many onlookers.

The appearance of religiously motivated violent attacks against society became more numerous in the decades leading up to this current moment in time. Fundamentalist branches of all monotheistic religions – Christian, Islam, and Judaism – have all participated in this phenomenon. The bombings of the World Trade Center in 1993 and 2001; the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995; a string of car bombs mainly in the Middle East; attacks surrounding the Gaza strip; and numerous abortion clinic bombings in the United States are but a few examples.

As noted before, many terrorist attacks are practiced by religious fundamentalist groups but a list of conflicts provided by Harris (2006) suggests that religiously inspired conflicts are not limited to the religious fundamentalists. In a recent study Fox (2004:70) concluded that “a significant percentage of all conflicts” are still religious conflicts. Harris (2006:26) provides the following examples of recent conflicts that were to a large extent religiously motivated: in Palestine (Jews vs. Muslims); in the Balkans (Orthodox Serbians vs. Catholic Croations, and Orthodox Serbians vs. Bosnian and Albanian Muslims); in Northern Ireland (Protestants vs. Catholics); in Sudan (Muslims vs. Christians); in Nigeria (Muslims vs. Christians); in Ethiopia and Eritrea (Muslims vs. Christians); and in Indonesia (Muslims vs. Timorese Christians).

Given these statistics it is not surprising that there are authors who consistently argue that, as sociologist Juergensmeyer put it, the “belief structure of religion becomes a breeding ground for violence” (Palmer-Fernandez, 2004:371). This study examines this statement and will illustrate that monotheistic religion provides a platform for the development of radical religious groups by creating a very strict ‘us/them’ duality. This ‘us/them’ duality inspires a kind of intolerance for the ‘other’ that could very easily motivate people to engage in violent conflict. Thus, the main hypothesis is that monotheistic religion breeds intolerance of a nature that can lead to the development of radical religious groups – religious fundamentalist groups. The reason for focusing on

monotheistic religion is because all three monotheistic religions claim to be in possession of the absolute and single truth. Thus, the first objective of this thesis is to analyse the link between monotheistic religion and intolerance.

## **1.2 Claims about Monotheistic Religion and Intolerance**

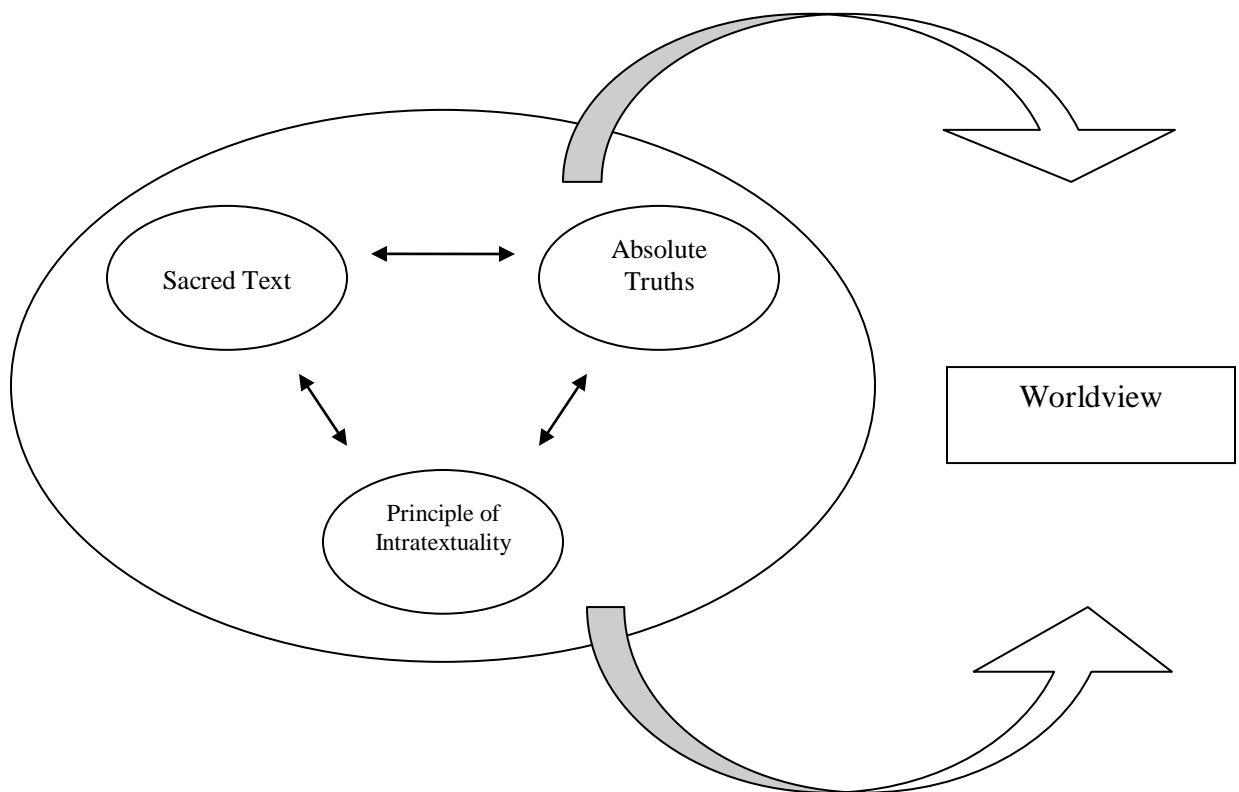
According to Cohn-Sherbok (1992:9) “genuine religious tolerance is achieved when people hold their religion as so important, so absolute that to part from it is to die, and at the same time realize from their absolute centre of being that another person’s values and beliefs are just as important and as real.” The question is: Does monotheistic religion promote such an attitude of tolerance as described by Cohn-Sherbok? All monotheistic religions claim to be in possession of the absolute truth – the single truth. Fisher (1999:10) argues that “intolerance and competition between the various religions... have historically been significant sources of conflict.” However, McTernan (2003:20) claims that those who blame religion for intolerance “overstate the religious factor.” But when religious social groups are analysed in context of the ‘us/them’ duality a clear divide emerges between these religious groups and the possibility of intolerance amongst these groups become increasingly likely.

Tétreault and Denemark (2004:273) argue that “religious social movements create powerful in-group solidarity and vicious out-group characterization.” Huntington (1993:29) explained in his influential article ‘*The Clash of Civilizations?*’ that when people “define their identities in religious terms, they are likely to see an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ relation between themselves and people of a different religion.” In other words, within each monotheistic religion there is “a clear divide between those who adhere to the true faith” and those who do not (Bruce, 2003:79). Bruce (2003:79) points out that “people may teach their children two languages but they do not teach them two religions.” Therefore Harris (2006:13) is convinced that all holy texts inspired by God “are in perverse agreement on one point of fundamental importance: ‘respect’ for other faiths... is not an attitude that God endorses” thus intolerance is “intrinsic to every creed.” The argument is thus that to see religion as a source of intolerance is not to “overstate the religious factor.”

Religion has a definite influence on our world and the views we hold of it. It succeeds in providing human beings with a very distinct frame of reference, probably more so than any other single belief system. This argument will be elaborated on in the following section where the intratextual model will be illustrated and explained.

### **1.3 Sacred Texts and Absolute Truths: An Intratextual Model**

In an attempt to understand fundamentalists Hood, Hill and Williamson (2005) developed the intratextual model. According to Hood et al. (2005:22) this model is not concerned with the content of fundamentalist belief but rather with “the structure and process of fundamentalist thought.” Thus, it is assumed that fundamentalists are correct when they argue that a sacred text guides itself, in other words, “a reader must go into the text and allow the text to speak for itself” (Hood et al, 2005:22). Figure 1.1 illustrates this structure of fundamentalist thought and will be explained in the following paragraphs.



**Figure 1.1: The Structure of Fundamentalist Thought (Hood et al. 2005:23)**

Hood et al. (2005:22) argue that the structure and process of fundamentalist thought “encapsulates three necessarily interrelated phenomena.” First there is the principle of intratextuality which refers to the belief that the reader should allow the text to guide itself. The two related phenomena are sacred texts and absolute truths. According to Hood et al (2005:22-23) this process “involves a dialogic encounter that emerges between the reader and the text in which the revelation of the Divine Being becomes illuminated in the form of absolute truths.” What is revealed as absolute truth “is of immediate necessity for maintaining the fundamentalist worldview” (Hood et al, 2005:23). It is important to note here that these sacred texts are not allowed to be criticised by external influences as “truth is above criticism and not subject to debate” (Hood et al, 2005:24). These absolute truths become an objective reality to the fundamentalist. From this point forward these absolute truths provide the individual with a very specific worldview. A repercussion of such beliefs is that those who do not believe in the objective reality of the fundamentalist is considered an outsider as they do not participate in the same reality (Hood et al, 2005:23). These fundamentalists develop a binary view of the world. Due to the existence of a single sacred text that carries the ultimate textual authority, those that do not recognise this text as the single source of authority are considered a threat to the fundamentalist worldview and are thus treated as outsiders or as enemies. According to the fundamentalist the world consists only of good and evil, members and outsiders.

To explain the importance of authoritative sacred text Hood et al. (2005) use Christian fundamentalism as an example. They argue: “For fundamentalists, the origin of the text is God, so it should be expected to speak with truth” (Hood et al, 2005:83). According to Hood et al. (2005:83) “this confidence in the authoritative sacred text, held as objective truth, is applicable whether the text is the Bible, the Quran, the Vedas, the Torah, or any other sacred text.” Of course, by taking a quick glance into fairly recent history one might add other texts that were considered by its followers to be an authoritative sacred text. Marx’s ‘Das Kapital’ comes to mind. In other words, authoritative sacred texts have not been confined to the realms of religion. Thus, some authors are quick to argue



that religion should not be singled out when discussing killing in the name of an absolute truth, for secular ideologies have claimed its fair share of lives for the very same reason. This argument will be explored in the following section.

#### **1.4 Religion vs. Secular Ideologies**

One of the main reasons that religion has been identified as a source of intolerance and conflict is due to its absolutist claims. Rummel (1997:93) argues that absolutist ideology or religion often leads to a reasoning where the ends justifies the means, where the elimination of “those social groups it finds objectionable” are justified in the name of the ideology or in the name of a religion. In essence, where absolutist claims exist, ideological or religious, the results can be atrocious.

Kimball (2008:1) states: “It is somewhat trite, but nevertheless sadly true, to say that more wars have been waged, more people killed, and these days more evil perpetrated in the name of religion than by any other institutional force in human history.” Statistics disagree with this statement. According to Rummel (1997:92) “hundreds of millions of deaths were carried out by secular regimes.” Communist Soviet Union, China, Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, Vietnam, North Korea, Yugoslavia, and Nazi Germany are responsible for nearly 128 million deaths. These countries killed in the name of a secular ideology. From 1917 until 1987 the Soviet Union murdered about 61 million people of which 55 million were their own citizens. Under Stalin alone 43 million perished at the hands of the Soviet regime. Communist China under Mao Tse-tung murdered 35 million people (Rummel, 1997:91). Although the named examples were responsible for the largest number of deaths, they are but a few examples of regimes that murdered their citizens for the sake of a secular absolutist ideology. No war fought in the name of religion has claimed nearly as many lives.

There are, however, a host of authors such as Harris, Dawkins and Hitchens who still argue that religion is the greatest source of intolerance and conflict in our modern world. Harris (2007:80) argues that “religion raises the stakes of human conflict much higher than tribalism, racism, or politics ever can, as it is the only form of in-group/out-group

thinking that casts the differences between people in terms of eternal rewards.” Dawkins (2006:324) argues that religious absolutism “constitutes a major reason for suggesting that religion can be a force for evil in the world.” While Hitchens (2007:36) is of opinion that religion “has been an enormous multiplier of tribal suspicion and hatred.”

Hedges (2006:205) argues that “the worst suffering in human history has been carried out by those who preach grand, utopian visions, those who seek to implant by force their narrow, particular version of goodness.” According to Hedges (2006:205) “this is true for all doctrines of personal salvation, from Christianity to ethnic nationalism to communism to fascism.” Figure 1.2 illustrates that both secular ideologies and religion have its fundamentalists and its non-fundamentalists – those individuals who are fixed on sacred texts and absolute truths and those who are moderate in their approach and accept the existence of multiple truths. A further distinction is made between violent and non-violent fundamentalists – those who take up arms in the name of religion or ideology and those that choose to withdraw.

	NON-FUNDAMENTALIST	FUNDAMENTALIST	
SECULAR IDEOLOGY	Western European Democracies	Marxism, Fascism, etc.	
RELIGION	Religious Moderates (Christian, Muslim, or Jew)	VIOLENT	NON-VIOLENT
		Hezbollah, Al Qaida, Christian Militia	The Amish

**Figure 1.2: Fundamentalism: Secular Ideology and Religion**

The reason for focusing on religious absolutist claims is due to the fact that since the very late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century religion and religious absolutist claims have had a more prominent and visibly violent influence on this world than secular ideology. In many instances it is found that religious fundamentalist groups are responsible for religiously motivated violent acts. It should however be stated that not all religious fundamentalist groups are violent. For instance, the Amish simply segregated from the secular world and do not commit violent acts against the secular world. But although not all religious fundamentalist groups are violent, religiously motivated attacks are often carried out by a religious fundamentalist group.

Another reason for choosing to focus on religious absolutist claims instead of secular absolutist claims is the fact that an ideology can be proven wrong, an ideology can fail and the followers of such an ideology can admit to this fact without committing a mortal sin. Religion is different. Its beliefs are constant and, in the fundamentalist case, non-evolutionary. An admittance to a failure of their doctrine, or an admittance to it being wrong is a sin very few adherers will make themselves guilty of. By admitting to the falsity of one's religion is to betray God and your fellow adherents and it will certainly result in eternal condemnation. Therefore, arguments have failed to discredit religious beliefs in the eyes of the believer.

It is clear that religion has its critics and this thesis will attempt to illustrate why these critics have a valid point by discussing religion within the framework of social identity theory.

### **1.5 Research Question and Research Aims**

This study will attempt to address the question asked by Palmer-Fernandez (2004:371) namely, is religion a “breeding ground for violence?” In other words, does monotheistic religion provide a platform for the development of radical religious groups through the creation of a very strict us/them duality?

The aim of this study is firstly to analyse the link between monotheistic religion and intolerance by making use of social identity theory. The second aim of this study is to provide appropriate illustrative examples for the options provided to deal with invidious comparisons as outlined by Tajfel and Turner (1979). By answering the research question and achieving the research aims, it is possible to explain the hard-to-understand phenomenon that is religious fundamentalism.

### **1.6 Methodology**

Jenkins (1996:7) is of opinion that “identity has become one of the unifying frameworks of intellectual debate.” The role of identity has been addressed by many traditions of the social sciences. Sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, historians, philosophers and political scientists have admitted to the importance of identity within their separate fields of study. According to Jenkins (1996:9) our concern about identity is “a relation of uncertainty produced by rapid change and cultural contact... we encounter others whose identity and nature are not clear to us.” One specific social group that has certainly baffled the world at times is religious fundamentalists. Whenever it is revealed that a violent attack on society was masterminded by followers of a seemingly peace-loving religion, one that promulgates love for thy neighbour, the world seems to be puzzled. It comes as no surprise then that religious fundamentalism is considered “a strange, hard-to-understand phenomena” (Berger, 1999:2). But a closer look reveals that the world simply lacks knowledge of this phenomenon. Religious fundamentalism can be adequately explained and understood by approaching it within the context of social identity.

Social identity theory, as created by Tajfel and Turner (1979), will be used to explain how religion creates the ‘us/them’ duality – this implies the creation of in- and out-groups. Within the context of religion writers often refer to in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. Dawkins (2006:297) is of opinion that “[religion’s] wanton and carefully nurtured divisiveness – its deliberate and cultivated pandering to humanity’s natural tendency to favour in-groups and shun out-groups – [is] enough to make it a significant force for evil in the world.” Thus, social identity theory will firstly

be used to analyse the link between monotheistic religion and intolerance. This thesis relies solely on the use of secondary data to compile a selective literature review concerning the area of religion and intolerance. The focus will fall on monotheistic religion, more specifically Christianity and Christian fundamentalism.

Apart from social identity theory Tajfel and Turner (1979) also provide “options for dealing with invidious comparisons.” The authors provide three different options for dealing with invidious comparisons. These options include individual mobility, social creativity and social competition. A fourth option, namely violence, was later added by Horowitz (2000) and this option will be added to the framework provided by Tajfel and Turner. The main framework of this literature review will be formed by the options for dealing with invidious comparisons as provided by Tajfel and Turner (1979) plus the extra option as provided by Horowitz (2000). In such a religiously inspired world it is important to know what options social groups are presented with to deal with invidious comparisons and which options religious social groups are most likely to make use of in order to ensure a position of high status on the social hierarchy.

Social identity theory, as created by Tajfel and Turner (1979), will be used to illustrate the link between monotheistic religion and intolerance. It is important to note that throughout this thesis a distinction will be made between non-fundamentalist religious groups and religious fundamentalist groups with a specific focus on Christianity. Christianity is still the largest religion in the world with roughly 1.8 billion followers worldwide (Kimball, 2008:6). It should also be noted that historically “Christianity contains considerably more violence and destruction than that of most other world religions” (Kimball, 2008:168).

### **1.6.1 Delimitations of Study**

This is not an explanatory study, but a selective, illustrative descriptive overview. The literature used for this particular study is not exclusive, nor exhaustive. Due to the vastness of literature that deals with the concept of religion and the amount of authors dedicated to explore this concept the writer had to be very selective in the choice of

literature used. The literature was chosen according to its relevance relative to the subject matter and the arguments made as well as the prominence of the authors within this field of study.

The specific authors that have been chosen to describe and illustrate the options for dealing with invidious comparisons as presented by Tajfel and Turner are Sam Harris, Jared Diamond, Karen Armstrong, Charles Kimball, and Donald Horowitz. Harris has received high praise for his work on religion and intolerance. Diamond is a prize-winning author of influential books of history and non-fiction. Armstrong is a highly acclaimed and award-winning author in the field of religion. Kimball, having been involved in negotiations and meetings with religious leaders in the Middle East, brings practical experience to his arguments. Horowitz is a highly acclaimed writer in the field of conflict – especially ethnic conflict. All of these mentioned authors are highly regarded in their specific fields of study and will provide valuable inputs to the framework presented by Tajfel and Turner.

It is important to note that although specific authors have been chosen to form the main framework for each option for dealing with invidious comparisons they will not be the only sources that will be relied upon. Supplementary literature will also be used in the discussion and evaluation of these options.

Social identity theory has been used by other prominent authors to explain the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism. Herriot (2007:25) states: “There appears to be no other theoretical perspective which offers as inclusive and powerful an explanation for the whole range of fundamentalist phenomena as does social identity theory.” This is because social identity theory specifically focuses on ‘us’ and ‘them’ dynamics while religion has been responsible for the vicious creation of in- and out-groups, for visions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Thus, social identity theory was specifically chosen due to its ability to explain the creation of in- and out-groups based on religion.

### **1.6.2 Limitations of Study**

Not all of the literature used revolves around the main concepts, namely religion and intolerance, although all of the literature carries relevance in the main argument or is relevant within the theoretical framework.

No comprehensive literature study has been done on the options for dealing with invidious comparisons as proposed by Tajfel and Turner. The authors used within this theoretical framework also did not identify themselves specifically within this framework and therefore it was up to the writer to use personal discretion in dividing the literature used into the appropriate category.

This study contributes to the theoretical framework regarding options for dealing with invidious comparisons as provided by Tajfel and Turner by finding appropriate illustrations to further describe the framework.

### **1.7 Chapter Outline**

The outline of this study is based on social identity theory, specifically how it relates to monotheistic religion and intolerance, and the options for dealing with invidious comparisons – specifically relating to the historical experiences of the Christian faith.

Chapter Two will provide an outline of social identity theory. This chapter will specifically focus on the ‘in-group/out-group thinking’ that has been referred to. Drawing mainly from the works of Tajfel and Turner (1979), but also from other influential academics in this field such as Allport (1954), and Hogg and Abrams (1988 & 2001), this chapter will describe social identity theory, how it relates to group formation and the identification of an out-group, and how in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination come into play. A relevant example will be used to illustrate social identity theory in practice.

The second part of Chapter Two will relate religion and intolerance to social identity theory. Here attention will be given to exactly how religion succeeds in creating in- and

out-groups and how monotheistic religions create incompatible worldviews which leads to competition and possibly conflict. An important distinction will be made between religious fundamentalist groups and non-fundamentalist religious groups. Here it will be argued that although fundamentalist groups are so intolerant of the 'other' that they sometimes employ violent means to achieve their ends it does not mean that non-fundamentalist groups are not intolerant of the 'other' just because they do not make use of violent tactics. The gradations of intolerance as provided by Allport (1954) will prove valuable in making a distinction between these two groups. This distinction will be important in the overall argument and should be kept in mind when the options for dealing with invidious comparisons are discussed.

A further analysis of options for dealing with invidious comparisons, as provided by Tajfel and Turner (1979), and the possibility of establishing peaceful ends in a world where religious fundamentalist groups are not uncommon will be provided in Chapter Three. Violence as an option, as later added by Horowitz (2000), will be discussed as well. These four sections will be the main focus of Chapter Three.

The first section of this chapter will deal with individual mobility. This refers to the fact that individuals can move from one group to another when they feel that such a move is the appropriate thing to do. This option will be discussed mainly using the works of Sam Harris (2006 & 2007) and Richard Dawkins (2006) who promote the option of leaving one group for another, more specifically, to leave religious affiliations behind and become a non-believer or an atheist so to speak. Their views will be discussed around a study completed by the PEW Forum in April 2009 which tracked the changes in religious affiliations in the United States.

The second section of Chapter Three will deal with social creativity. This option is further divided into three sub-parts namely (a) Comparing the in-group to the out-group on some new dimension; (b) Changing the values assigned to the attributes of the group, so comparisons which were previously negative are now positive; and (c) Changing the out-group. Under option (a) which deals with a new dimension of comparison the writer



will mainly rely on ‘*Collapse: How societies choose to fail or survive*’ (2005) by Jared Diamond to provide a framework for the discussion of this option. In his book Diamond illustrates how some societies were able to completely change the main dimension of comparison as a survival strategy. The Thirty Years’ War and the Peace of Westphalia will be used to illustrate how the salient dimension of comparison was changed between Protestants and Catholics after a peace agreement was reached. Under option (b) which deals with the changing of the rankings the writer will mainly draw on the works of Karen Armstrong (2006) and Charles Kimball (2008). Both these authors promote religious modernisation as a strategy to overcome intolerance and exclusivist behaviour within the religious paradigm. To illustrate how a social group can turn a negative aspect into a positive aspect the work of Virgil Elizondo (1983) will be relied upon. Under option (c) which deals with changing the out-group the writer will again draw on the work of Armstrong (2006). Here Armstrong argues that in order to overcome intolerance we need to create a global collective consciousness where we create an in-group that includes all human beings. The viability and the practical reality of this idea will be explored in Chapter Three.

The third section of Chapter Three will focus on social competition. Here it is argued that in-groups and out-groups compete for scarce resources, in this case status and power within the religious paradigm. In this section the writer will draw on the work of Pyle and Davidson (2003) to illustrate the role of religious competition in colonial America. The examples of Congregationalists vs. Anglicans for the establishment of a bishop in America and competition between Anglicans, Presbyterians and Baptists for political power in Virginia will be used.

The fourth section of Chapter Three will discuss violence as a reaction. Here, again, the writer will rely on the work of Karen Armstrong (2006). Armstrong argues that we might not have a choice but accept to violence as an undeniable fact of life. The fact that each monotheistic religious group has incompatible views of the world we live in, will inspire many to use violent means in order to establish their worldview as the only accepted worldview, or at least as the most prominent worldview. The views of Donald Horowitz

(2000) on 'backward' and 'advanced' groups will prove to be a valuable component of the argument revolving around social competition. Here the role of religious fundamentalist groups will be the main focus point.

The fourth and concluding chapter will provide an evaluation of the options for dealing with invidious comparisons. These options will be evaluated according to their viability specifically for religious fundamentalists. This will be done in an attempt to explain the "hard-to-understand" phenomena that is religious fundamentalism. Based on the options for dealing with invidious comparisons the prospects for establishing peaceful ends will also be discussed. Finally, possible areas for future research will be highlighted.

*Chapter 2*

**Social Identity Theory:  
Religion and the Creation of Out-Groups**

*The group spirit, involving knowledge of the group as such, some idea of the group, and some sentiment of devotion or attachment to the group, is then the essential condition of all collective life, and all collective action – McDougall, 1921 (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:6).*

**2.1 Social Identity Theory**

Traditionally social psychology mainly focused on “the role of the individual in the group” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:3). It was found that this approach had its limitations as it could not provide the science with a framework for dealing with “large scale group phenomena [and] the societal construction of self” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:3). Primarily during the 1970s a new approach began to take form, an approach that turned “the traditional perspective on its head” by focusing on the group in the individual. This was to be called the social identity approach (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:3). The central belief of this approach is that belonging to a group involves a psychological state which differs from that of being a separate individual, and that it bestows social identity, or “a shared representation of who one is and how one should behave” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:3). Social identity differs from personal identities. The former “are derived from group membership, and regular group behaviour” while the latter refers to “the individual’s unique blend of experiences and characteristics, and direct individual and personal behaviour” (Herriot, 2007:26).

According to Austin and Worchel (1979:9) intergroup relations “refer to relations between two or more groups and their respective members.” Social identity theory makes certain assumptions concerning society and intergroup relations. The first assumption is that society consists of social categories that stand in status and power

relations to one another. The social categories are based on characteristics such as religion, class, race, nationality, gender, and so forth. Some of these categories enjoy more power and status than others. It is also important to note that none of these categories can stand in isolation. These categories can only be formed in contrast to other categories. Allport (1954:41) argues: “Every line, fence or boundary marks off an inside from an outside [and] therefore, in strict logic, an in-group always implies the existence of some corresponding out-group.” For instance, a social category formed on the basis of Christianity is quite meaningless if it does not distinguish between those who are Christians and those who are Muslims or Jews. In order for any category to have meaning or relevance it is thus of great importance that a contrasting category exists (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:14).

Social categories inspire group formation. Tajfel and Turner (1979:38) define the group as “a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership of it.” A group or social category provides the group member with a structure of self-reference and thus an identity. Seul (1999:556) defines group identity as “members’ shared conception of its enduring characteristics and basic values, its strengths and weaknesses, its hopes and fears, its reputation and conditions of existence, its institutions and traditions, its past history, current purposes, and future prospects.”

Kelman, as cited in Seul (1999), identifies three processes of social influence in identity construction through interaction with group members. These are compliance, identification, and internalisation. Compliance involves conformity to a group’s expectations in order to gain approval and to secure favourable treatment. To a certain extent it also involves obedience to authority figures. A slightly more advanced process of social influence involves identification. Identification refers to the process where an individual adopts the behaviour of the group in order to be successfully associated with the group and establish a self-concept related to the group. This mainly involves adopting “pre-established identities” and gaining status as an individual by belonging to

the specific group. Internalisation is the most advanced process of social influence. This occurs when the individual adopts characteristics of the group's behaviour because they find that the group values are consistent with their own values (Seul, 1999:555).

Tajfel and Turner (1979:40) argue that social identity consists "of those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging." Belonging to a group will inspire certain "groupy" behaviours such as "conformity to in-group norms and discrimination against the out-group" so that once an individual belongs to a group they will act accordingly (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:3; Herriot, 2007:30).

Social identity theory emphasizes the importance of being a member of, or belonging to, a group and the effects this membership will have on the individual and influence the individual's behaviour. Belonging to a group will most likely inspire feelings of attraction toward other members of the in-group. It can also lead to the stereotyping of the out-group and the creation of negative bias toward out-group members and a favourable bias toward the in-group (Hogg & Abrams, 2001:254). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979:38) in-group bias refers to "the tendency to favor the in-group over the out-group in evaluation and behaviour." This type of biased behaviour is motivated by the need to enhance self-esteem (Herriot, 2007:28). Evidence has shown that this is an "omnipresent feature of intergroup relations" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:38). The minimal group paradigm, a model created based on an experiment performed by Tajfel and Turner, proves the mere fact of belonging to a group is a sufficient condition for creating in-group bias (Hogg & Abrams, 2001:175). This paradigm has consistently shown that group members always try to maximize the in-group's gains and the out-group's losses. In cases it has shown that in-group members will settle to gain less for their own group as long as the out-group loses more (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:49). The conclusions that have been drawn from this paradigm is first, that a high level of out-group discrimination can be expected and second, the mere fact of belonging to a group is a sufficient condition for the existence of intergroup competition and discrimination (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:51).

There are two ways by which an individual can attain group membership. Allport (1954:33) explains that sometimes an individual needs to fight to attain in-group membership. This is referred to as attained status. However, memberships are predominantly “conferred automatically by birth and family tradition” (Allport, 1954:33). This is referred to as ascribed status. In the case of ascribed status the individual is born into an existing structure where categories are formed on the basis of a number of factors such as place of birth, race, parentage, religion, and so forth. Individuals will become part of some groups but not of others as determined by these factors. The individual will then “internalize the dominant ideology” of their group and in the process acquire a particular social identity which could either be positive or negative depending on the collective group’s status (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:27). The reason why individuals are fond of identifying with a group or belonging to a group is because this identification is such an essential facet of self-definition (Hogg & Abrams, 2001:254). Self-esteem can be increased by the mere fact of belonging to a group because “it requires a degree of acceptance by one’s fellow adherents” (Herriot, 2007:100). Also, by comparing your own group to the out-group the individual is able to enhance self-esteem (Herriot, 2007:100).

Once group identity, and thus the identity of its members, has been established the in-group will identify certain out-groups. The concepts of in-group and out-group are widely used within social identity theory. To conceptualise in-group it is best to use the definition provided by Allport (1954). Although he admits to the fact that defining an in-group precisely is difficult he states that “members of an in-group all use the term *we* with the same essential significance” (Allport, 1954:31). In contrast, the out-group is all of those who are not classified as being part of the in-group.

In order to differentiate the in-group from the out-group three variables should come into play. First, the internalisation of the individual into the group should have occurred - meaning the individual’s concept of self must be linked with the group’s status. Second, the dimension of comparison between the in-group and out-group must be relevant. Tajfel and Turner (1979:41) argue that “not all between-group differences have

evaluative significance.” Comparisons that are made and the evaluations derived from them should be significant on some level. Third, in-groups do not compare themselves with any or all available out-groups. The group of comparison should be relevant to the in-group. Factors such as “similarity, proximity and situational salience” determine comparability (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:41). The overall aim of comparison and differentiation is to achieve a position of superiority over the group(s) of comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:41). Hogg and Abrams (1988:23) are of opinion that “it is important to accentuate intergroup differences especially on those dimensions which reflect favorably upon the in-group.” Should the in-group make a comparison on a dimension where they “fall at the evaluatively positive pole, the in-group acquires a positive distinctiveness, and thus a relatively positive identity in comparison to the out-group.”

Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that certain assumptions can be made about individuals and their group membership. First, individuals strive to attain a positive sense of self, an enhanced self-esteem. Second, since the individual is an integrated part of a group the group membership will determine whether the individual’s self-concept will be positive or negative based on the evaluation of the group as a whole. Third, the evaluation of the group is determined through comparisons with other groups “in terms of value-laden attributes and characteristics” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:40). A positive outcome of these comparisons will result in high prestige while a negative outcome will result in low prestige. Another assumption that can be made based on the previous assumptions is that a positive social identity is to a large extent based on favourable comparisons made between the in-group and the out-group. When the individual is not satisfied with the status of the group, and thus their social identity, they can leave the group and join a group of higher status or they can try to find a way to make their existing group’s identity “more positively distinct” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:40). The perception that individuals hold of the group that they belong to has a profound effect on their social identity. Those who consider their group to have high status identify more strongly with it. Stronger identification leads to a greater commitment to the group and its objectives (Herriot, 2007: 36).

From the outline provided it is evident that there are certain consequences which present themselves as a result of in-group formation. When the in-group is formed it is formed relative to another group or in opposition to another group. It follows then that members of the in-group are likely to show discriminatory behaviour towards members of the out-group while favouring the in-group. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that if it is true that this “generic norm of behaviour” exists toward the out-group it implies that there are some consequences which should follow. The first is that discriminatory behaviour towards the out-group may be present even if it is not in the in-group’s interest to show such behaviour – meaning if the in-group will not gain anything as a result of this discriminatory behaviour. The second consequence is that discriminatory behaviour may manifest itself even if attitudes of hostility toward the out-group were previously absent. A point that follows from this is the fact that discriminatory behaviour may be present before feelings of hostility or attitudes of prejudice have been formed. If these consequences are accurate we can expect discriminatory intergroup behaviour even when there is no conflict of interest involved or where there is no history of intergroup hostility (Hogg & Abrams, 2001:181-182).

### **2.1.1 Intergroup Competition**

Social identity theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979) mainly deals with intergroup conflict. They are mostly concerned with intergroup competition over scarce resources and the consequences of such competition. They also refer to the fact that “superordinate goals” make cooperation possible while a conflict of interest between two groups “develop[s] through competition into overt social conflict” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:33).

Intergroup relations are characterised by intergroup competition. Hogg and Abrams (2001:175) describe intergroup relations as being “at best competitive and at worst outright hostile and discriminatory.” Groups will compete over scarce resources which can either be material - where it involves land, water, money, and so forth - or psychological where it mainly involves issues of status and/or power. Tajfel and Turner (1979:36) assert that “whenever social stratification is based upon unequal division of



scarce resources – such as power, prestige, or wealth – between social groups” the relationship will be characterised by out-group antagonism between “over- and underprivileged groups.” In the act of competing these groups also strive to “promote and protect their positive distinctiveness from one another and secure a relatively favourable social identity” (Hogg & Abrams, 2001:9). Group members are usually motivated at individual level to compete with members of the out-group due to the fact that “group membership mediates self-evaluation via social identity” (Hogg & Abrams, 2001:9). In essence this means that being part of a ‘winning’ team or a superior group makes individuals feel good about themselves – it inspires “a positive sense of self-esteem” (Hogg & Abrams, 2001:9).

While intergroup competition can lead to higher group status, increased prestige, and as a result positive self-identification for individual members, it also leads to greater intragroup cohesiveness (Austin & Worchel, 1979:216). It has also been found that the more a group succeeds when engaged in intergroup competition the more favourable their attitudes become toward the in-group while out-group discrimination increases (Austin & Worchel, 1979:217). Intergroup competition “enhances intragroup morale, cohesiveness and cooperation” while conflict “heighten[s] identification with, and positive attachment to, the in-group” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:33).

The status relations between the dominant and subordinate group will determine the subordinate group’s identity problems. The subordinate group will frequently see themselves as inferior and an antagonistic feeling arises towards the dominant group. In such a case the subordinate group may reject their negative in-group evaluation and in return create a positive group identity which is often accompanied by a revived aggression to achieve their objectives. However, there are exceptions to this rule. It has been found that “where social structural differences in the distribution of resources have been institutionalized, legitimized, and justified through a consensually accepted status systems” feelings of antagonism towards the dominant group were reduced (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:37). Thus, an unequal distribution of resources will lead to feelings of antagonism toward the dominant group only if the subordinate group reject their identity

based on inferiority and instead create a positive group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:38).

### **2.1.2 The Sherif Experiment at Robbers Cave (1954)**

To illustrate social identity theory in practice it is appropriate to provide the reader with an outline of an experiment performed by Sherif. In a series of experiments ranging from 1949 to 1954 Sherif attempted to explore the issue of intergroup relations. This section will exclusively focus on the 1954 experiment which was conducted at a summer camp at Robbers Cave for boys between the ages of eleven and twelve years. These boys had never had any contact with each other prior to their arrival at the summer camp. All of them had more or less the same background – coming from white, Protestant, middle-income backgrounds. In terms of their physical and intellectual characteristics they were all considered to be ‘normal’. It is also important to note that the camp organisers were researchers and the boys were unaware of the fact that an experiment was being conducted, much less so that they were the central focus of this experiment (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:43).

At arrival the boys were simply divided into two groups who would be living in separate cabins and would independently engage in activities such as cooking, camping out, and so forth. During this period “the groups developed their own codes, nicknames and jargon, and defined their territory by naming various landmarks” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:44). They developed group norms and rules and ridiculed those members that did not abide by these norms and rules in an effort to keep the members in line. They also named their groups, in this specific case ‘The Rattlers’ and ‘The Eagles’. This completed the group formation stage as the groups had created a clear set of internal norms and values which members were expected to adhere to (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:44).

After the group formation stage was successfully completed the researchers moved on to the second stage which involved the two groups, who previously operated independent of each other, to come into contact. Here the two groups would compete for a prize. Thus, a tournament was launched involving different games such as a treasure hunt and a

baseball match. During these games “the initial spirit of goodwill disappeared” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:44). The boys began to tease and mock members of the other group and called them names. By the end of the tournament the boys from the two separate groups refused to speak to each other and what is more, they launched secret attacks on each other’s cabins. There was also an interesting incident at the end of a game which required each team to collect as many scattered beans as they could within a predetermined time. At the end of this game the boys were asked to gather round. For a brief moment the beans that were collected by group A were displayed on the screen and the boys were asked to estimate the amount of beans displayed. This was done again to display the amount of beans collected by group B. In actual fact both slides showed thirty-five beans but each time the in-group overestimated the amount of beans on the screen while the out-group underestimated the very same amount (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:44).

The conclusions that were finally drawn from this specific study were as follows. The first conclusion drawn was that “cultural, physical, and personality differences are not necessary for the emergence of intergroup conflict” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:44-45). The second conclusion was that “the existence of two groups in competition for a goal which only one can attain is a sufficient condition for intergroup hostility” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:45).

This experiment was chosen as an example because of its ability to illustrate how in-groups are formed and how this affects intergroup relations and behaviour towards the out-group. It also illustrates how norms are created within the in-group and how membership is internalised through adherence to these norms. Furthermore, it illustrates that discrimination, hostile attitudes, and biased behaviour came into play when these groups were competing against each other. More conclusions that can be drawn from the experiment at Robbers Cave is that when groups engage in competition where gain or loss is measured in zero-sum terms, meaning what the one group gains the other loses, unfavourable stereotypes of the out-group will be formed. These unfavourable attitudes will be standardised over time up to the point where “the out-group is placed at a

prejudicial distance even to the point that group members want nothing whatever to do with members of the out-group” (Austin & Worchel, 1979:10).

## **2.2 Religion and the Creation of In- and Out-Groups**

According to Seul (1999:567) “religion remains a powerful source of individual and group identity [because] religion frequently serves the identity impulse more powerfully and comprehensively than other repositories of cultural meaning can or do.” In terms of religion and identity Seul (1999:558) argues that apart from religion “no other repositories of cultural meaning have historically offered so much in response to the human need to develop a secure identity [and therefore] religion is often at the core of individual and group identity.”

Religion is able to supply the individual with aspects that significantly contribute to their identity. These include moral frameworks, institutions, traditions and so forth. This can provide the individual with a sense of stability and belonging (Seul, 1999:553). Seul (1999:553) is of opinion that “the peculiar ability of religion to serve the human identity impulse may partially explain why intergroup conflict so frequently occurs along religious faultlines.”

It is simply not true that religious intolerance always inspires violent behaviour but instances can be found where religious intolerance has inspired violence. Religion mostly leads to violence within a peculiar set of circumstances – usually in times when religion becomes “fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for change” (Juergensmeyer, 2001:10). These circumstances can often be found where groups actively pursue a positive identification in the hierarchy of social groups.

Selengut (2003:238) argues that “so long as religion is about ultimate truth and commitment to the sacred, to a vision of utopia described in holy scripture, men and women will be defenders of the faith and willing soldiers in the battles for God.” These claims made by Selengut will be investigated in the following sections.

### **2.2.1 Absolute Truth Claims**

*It is not the diversity of opinions (which cannot be avoided), but the refusal of toleration to those that are different opinions (which might have been granted), that has produced all the bustles and wars that have been in the Christian world upon account of religion – John Locke (1963:105).*

Hick (1985:16) is of opinion that “the importance of religious beliefs to the believer lies ultimately in the assumption that they are substantially true references of the nature of reality.” Kimball (2008:49) agrees with this statement when he argues that in every religion truth claims “constitute the foundation on which the entire structure rests.” This idea has already been explained through the intratextual model outlined in Chapter One. In believing that your religion is the only true religion it also means that you believe salvation is restricted to the followers of your faith and that you are thus in a position of unique superiority (Hick, 1985:49). It is then possible for religious groups to construct a hierarchy consisting of all religious groups and rate them according to how close they are to the truth or how far they are from it.

The holy texts of all three monotheistic religions provide their readers with a clear indication of the holy ones and the infidels, the ones that will gain access to heaven and the ones that will be condemned for all eternity. Thus, these texts provide their readers with a clear indication of the in-group and the out-group (Seul, 1999:560). The very fact that these texts promote an image of God saving some and punishing others contribute to the notion that there exist an ‘us’ and ‘them’, a right and wrong, and a superior and inferior (Ritter & O’Neill, 1996:40).

Truth claims justify attitudes of verbal rejection and discrimination and behaviours such as the use of physical violence towards those who do not adhere to the one true religion. The problem is that once an in-group and out-group are established intergroup relations have the tendency to become vicious and outright cruel. It is often the case that members of the out-group fall outside the boundaries of the in-group’s moral concern. Harris (2006) provides a fitting, nonetheless upsetting, example. He asks how a Nazi soldier

was able to return home after a day's work of torturing and killing Jews, adults and children alike, and be a loving father to his children and a loving husband to his wife. According to Harris (2006:176) the answer is quite simple: the Jews were not "objects of his moral concern" because they were members of the out-group.

According to Kimball (2008:54) absolute truth claims have "potentially destructive consequences [as] people presume to know God, abuse sacred texts, and propagate their particular versions of absolute truth." Due to the fact that adherents to the 'true' religion accept their beliefs as being the absolute truth they rarely question or criticize their own beliefs and, as a result, their beliefs become rigid and fixed (Kimball, 2008:54). Rigid truth claims often leads to the dehumanisation of the out-group and their 'false' beliefs. In times of conflict these truth claims become an even more volatile basis for demonizing and dehumanizing the out-group (Kimball, 2008:61).

It is no far stretch to come to the conclusion that it is the narrow religious worldviews described in this section that inspire intolerance and ultimately conflict. Overcoming these narrow religious worldviews may be the answer to overcoming religious intolerance but it also may just be one of the biggest challenges this world currently faces (Kimball, 2008:4). The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas wrote: "Outbursts of violence derive not from the breakdown of reason but from employing the wrong sort of reason, the sort that learns there is no place for the other" (Palmer-Fernandez, 2004:371).

### **2.2.2 Religious Worldviews: In Pursuit of Utopia**

*...people appeared who began devising ways of bringing men together... so that all might live in harmony. Wars were waged for the sake of this notion... 'the wise' strove with all expedition to destroy 'the unwise' and those who failed to grasp their idea, so they might not hinder its triumph – Fyodor Dostoyevsky (Gray, 2008:20).*

Foucault describes a worldview as "a paradigm of thinking that defines the conditions... of all knowledge" (Juergensmeyer, 2001:13). According to Juergensmeyer (2001:13) "it also involves the notion of a nexus of socially embedded ideas about society."

Every monotheistic religion provides its followers with a worldview (Seul, 1999:559). The reader is once again referred back to the intratextual model on page four where the influence of sacred texts and absolute truths on the religious individual's worldview is illustrated. This worldview is tied to certain social expectations, rules and norms, and a view of what the perfect society should look like, in other words, what their utopia consists of. By presenting its followers with a concrete worldview religion inspires its adherents to think and behave in a certain way (Fox & Shmuel, 2004:2). Religious traditions provide a worldview which supplies the individual and/or the group with a purpose and an ultimate goal. This worldview, inspired by sacred texts and religious traditions, provides "symbolic maps for the journey" (Kimball, 2008:202). For instance, the Bible, ranging from Genesis to Revelations, provides the Christian community with a frame of reference which explains where they come from and where they are going (Kimball, 2008:202). The individual will also be able to draw on this framework in terms of attitudes and behaviour toward the out-group.

Kimball (2008:209) argues that "our ways of seeing and interpreting the world, or framing issues, and even of asking questions" are strongly tied to our religious backgrounds and traditions. Different religions have different views of what 'the good life' is that their followers should aspire to achieve by putting forward a variety of ideals. Should one achieve this 'good life' it would bring ultimate happiness to the individual (Brümmer, 2007:185,191). Because different religions present their followers with different worldviews we often find several groups striving to establish their worldview as the dominant worldview, and although not all of these groups use violence as a means to establish their worldview, tensions are sure to arise. The fact that different worldviews exist, of which only one can be true when taking single truth claims into account, leads at best to uneasy relations between the different religious groups. If every monotheistic religion promotes their worldview as the superior worldview and adherents strive to establish a utopian society based on these worldviews, they are bound to have some clashes of interest and antagonistic behaviour between these groups will be at the order of the day. Gray (2003:23) argues that these clashes are "endemic in every society." In the

history of religion we can find many examples of communities that strived to achieve the ideal perfection by creating a utopia based on their religious frameworks (Gray, 2008:23). Gray (2003:23) provides the example of the theocratic-communist city-state set up by John of Leyden as such a religious utopia. The fact that every religious community “outlines a path toward the desired goal” urges us to ask the question: How can each group function best “in a world in which most others don’t share the same understanding” (Kimball, 2008:23, 100)? Another important question that should be addressed is whether violent attacks can be avoided in the process? These questions will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

Juergensmeyer (2001:7) admits to be puzzled by the fact that people who adhere to religions that are “dedicated to a moral vision of the world” are capable of committing such violent acts as has often been the case. He should not be puzzled by this fact for it is exactly because these people are so ‘dedicated to a moral vision of the world’ that they would go to any lengths to make their vision the dominant vision of all people. Hitchens (2007:231) argues that “the ideal of a utopian state on earth, perhaps modeled on some heavenly ideal, is very hard to efface and has led people to commit terrible crimes in the name of the ideal.”

### **2.3 Religious Fundamentalism vs. Non-Fundamentalism**

The Fundamentalist Project at the University of Chicago there are five main features that distinguish religious fundamentalist movements from non-fundamentalist movements. The first feature of fundamentalist movements is reactivity. The movements form as a reaction to modernism. The second feature is dualism which means they view the world in binary terms, as either good or evil. The third feature is authority. Fundamentalists are willing to obey their holy text and the leaders of their movement. The fourth feature is selectivity. This refers to the fact that fundamentalists choose which parts of their holy book enjoy precedence over others. The fifth feature is millennialism. Fundamentalists believe in the end God will establish his kingdom on earth. Not all fundamentalist movements contain all five of these features but to some extent each movement conforms to a number of these features. The fundamentalist movements that exhibit most of these



features are found within the monotheistic framework. The one common feature that all fundamentalist movements have is the fact that they were formed as a reaction to modernism. Fundamentalist movements perceive modern society to be hostile to religion, thus, their main objective is to destroy it (Herriot, 2007:6-7). According to Herriot (2007:9) it is this reactivity that “constitutes an opportunity for the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dynamic which underpins social conflict.”

Apart from the five features, another difference can be found between religious fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist groups. The fundamentalist worldview is absolutist. In their minds there are no doubts that they adhere to the one authentic faith and that their beliefs and way of living should be adopted by everyone else. The non-fundamentalist groups are more open to the fact that they live in a diverse society and that other people hold different values and beliefs, to which they are completely entitled (Herriot, 2007:11).

According to Allport (1954:49) “people with salient attitudes toward out-groups may express them with all degrees of intensity.” He identifies three gradations of intolerance. The first and lowest form of intolerance is verbal rejection. This includes anything from jokes about out-group members to a degrading term used to refer to members of the out-group. Stereotypes have a significant influence here. When verbal rejection reaches a high degree of intensity it can lead to the second degree of intolerance, namely discrimination (Allport, 1954:49-51). The United Nations defines discrimination as the act of denying individuals or groups of people the “equality of treatment which they may wish” (Austin & Worchel, 1979:191). According to Allport discrimination “legitimizes the exclusion of a whole category of individuals who find themselves marked or stigmatized as members of an out-group... and it functions to prove the inferiority of out-group standards to our own” (Austin & Worchel, 1979:191). This also includes formal segregation which involves complete spatial separation that “accentuates the disadvantage of members of an out-group” (Allport, 1954:49). An intense degree of discrimination can lead to the third and highest degree of intolerance, namely physical attack. In the case of physical attack the in-group has completely failed to look at

members of the out-group as individuals but rather sees them as completely embedded in the identity of the out-group – implying the firm establishment of stereotypes. Long periods of verbal rejection and discrimination usually precede the use of physical violence (Allport, 1954:57-58).

According to the Fundamentalism Project the term fundamentalism “refers to a discernable pattern of religious militancy by which self-style ‘true believers’ attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviours” (Herriot, 2007:6). It should however be noted that not all religious fundamentalists show a ‘pattern of religious militancy’ as not all religious fundamentalist movements are violent. For instance, the Amish, mainly found in Pennsylvania, is a religious fundamentalist movement that has not committed any violent acts against the secular world. They have simply removed themselves from it and now live in seclusion. It is thus important to mention that the difference between religious fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist movements is not necessarily a difference between groups that use violence as a means to an end and those that do not use violence. But it is also true that although not all religious fundamentalist groups engage in religious violence, violent acts committed in the name of religion are often committed by religious fundamentalists. These groups engage in the highest degree of intolerance, namely physical attack.

The aim of providing gradations of intolerance in this case is to illustrate that religious fundamentalists, violent or not violent, show a higher degree of intolerance towards the out-group than non-fundamentalist religious movements. While non-fundamentalist religious movements may only verbally reject the other, religious fundamentalist movements show much higher degrees of intolerance. The Amish, although non-violent, have separated themselves spatially from the out-group. They have segregated by choice to form their own community of people who adhere to the same religion and engage in the same practices, thus accentuating their own superiority. Armstrong (2004:215) calls this an act to “create holiness by means of segregation.” According to the gradations of intolerance spatial separation can be seen as a high degree of discrimination. Thus, the

Amish case illustrates that even non-violent fundamentalist groups show a higher degree of intolerance than non-fundamentalist religious groups. There are, of course, a number of religious fundamentalist groups that commit violent acts against the out-group. This is graded as the highest degree of intolerance by Allport (1954). It has been illustrated in this paragraph that both non-violent religious fundamentalist groups as well as violent religious fundamentalist groups are more intolerant of the out-group than non-fundamentalist religious groups, when measured against the gradations provided by Allport. Thus, a further analysis of religious fundamentalism and social identity is required.

### **2.3.1 Religious Fundamentalism and Social Identity**

According to Armstrong (2006) religious fundamentalism has become a force that cannot be ignored. She is of opinion that it is “an essential part of the modern scene... and it is crucial, therefore, that we try to understand what this religiosity means... and how best we should deal with it” (Armstrong, 2004:x).

Christianity claims to be in possession of the single and absolute religious truth. It is also the largest religion with about 1.8 billion followers worldwide. Timmerman and Segaert (2003:53) argue that “the deep sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’, the tendency to regard the other as alien, rather than simply different, is built into Christian consciousness from the earliest times.” Kimball (2008:80) argues that truth claims can lead individuals to see themselves as God’s agents and it follows from this that “people so emboldened are capable of violent and destructive behaviour in the name of religion.” Although their ideology is based on their holy book it also includes very selective reading and interpretation in order to motivate action (Herriot, 2007:19).

Kimball (2008:33) argues that “a substantial number of Christians” believe their religion is the only ‘true’ or authentic religion and those who do not adhere to it are condemned in the eyes of God. According to these Christians other religions are simply man-made and therefore flawed. Texts that are often cited as proof of Christianity’s superiority are John 3:18 and John 14:6. In John 3:18 is written: “Whoever believes in him will not be

condemned, but whoever does not believe in him has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” John 14:6 reads: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” These are only two of the numerous examples one could find in the Bible that promote single truth claims (Knitter, 2002:3, 28). These exclusivist views are “the foundation for tribalism that will not serve us well in the twenty-first century” (Kimball, 2008:33). It is important to note that this kind of exclusivist behaviour is not limited to Christianity but can be found in other religious traditions as well. For the purposes of explanation and due to its large following Christian fundamentalism will be used as an example throughout this section.

Tétrault and Denemark (2004:12) describe the religious orientation of fundamentalism as “a reactive response to perceived or realized threats to a community defined by shared religious beliefs.” Fundamentalists also “frequently incorporate utopian visions of communal life to guide every practice” (Tétrault & Denemark, 2004:12). Although it is not only religious fundamentalists who hold a view of a utopian society it is only fundamentalists who actively pursue this utopia. In actively striving to establish their ideal society some fundamentalists incorporate violent means to achieve their ends. Besides, according to the fundamentalists, their actions are executed in the name of God and therefore justified (Kimball, 2008:138). In many cases, especially in religious fundamentalist groups, religion has been able to supply the ideology, motivation, organisational structure, not to mention justification for violent acts in the name of God (Juergensmeyer, 2001:5).

According to social identity theory there are mainly two reasons why the individual will join a group: “the need for self-esteem and the reduction of uncertainty” (Herriot, 2007:37). Because individual self-esteem is linked to group identity it means that when a group is victorious and gains status the group member is victorious and gains status, self-esteem and superiority in relation to the out-group. By belonging to a group the individual can also reduce uncertainty. Due to the beliefs, values and norms the group provides its members with a set identity which can regulate actions. It provides the

members with a frame of reference. The case is similar for religious fundamentalists. The beliefs, values and norms of the group provide its members with a clear indication of how they should act, what attitudes to have towards certain issues, and what to believe. It provides a clear worldview (Herriot, 2007:37).

According to social identity theory individual members of a group will define themselves in terms of the group to which they belong. In religious fundamentalist terms this translates to members believing that they were chosen by God to do His will here on earth (Herriot, 2007:26). For fundamentalists self-esteem is enhanced through the knowledge that they have been specifically “chosen by God to act as His agent[s] on earth” and, in terms of dualistic views, that they belong to the good as opposed to the evil side (Herriot, 2007:50).

As the individual internalises the group’s social identity the behaviour of the individual will reflect this group identity. Their behavior will be that of a group member, from that moment forward the individual becomes a fundamentalist Christian and will behave accordingly. The group member will not be seen as an individual with a personal identity anymore but rather as a group member conforming to group identity (Herriot, 2007:30).

A typical fundamentalist movement obliges its members to strictly conform to the movement’s beliefs, values and norms. The cohesion that results from this strict conformity will benefit the entire group. Patterns of church membership in the United States have shown a decline in liberal ‘mainstream’ churches (Herriot, 2007:47). The success of fundamentalist churches may be an indication of a preference for a more strict religion. Herriot (2007:47) explains that “a strict religion requires extensive socialization into a conformist, tightly-knit and mutually reaffirming group, which reinforces its social identity.” The mere fact that fundamentalist churches have not modernised or liberalised has resulted in an increase in membership. This may be due to greater self-esteem, the reduction of uncertainty, and a sense of greater group cohesion that these churches provide their members with. It also points to the fact that churches that provide their

members with a strict set of values, norms and beliefs are more attractive to fundamentalists because it places them in clear opposition to the secular world.

Group identity provides its members with a sense of self which in turns influence their perception of others. For instance, if an individual is an adherent to the doctrine of Christianity he will define the members of the out-group in relation to his own identity. When dualist beliefs are taken into account members of the out-group will be defined either as an adherent or an infidel (Herriot, 2007:29). The members of a fundamentalist group regard themselves as “uniquely blessed” and as a result considers themselves to be superior, and in return, treat the out-group as inferior (Herriot, 2007:27).

Christian fundamentalists’ beliefs are based on the five fundamentals as proposed in the early nineteenth century. These include “the inerrancy of Scripture; the Virgin Birth of Christ; Christ’s atonement for our sins on the cross; his bodily resurrection; and the objective reality of his miracles” (Armstrong, 2004:171). These fundamentals were created as a reaction against modernity which was “destroying the foundation of Christian faith and identity” (Knitter, 2002:22). When the validity or authenticity of these fundamentals is challenged fundamentalists perceive it as a threat to their identity (Herriot, 2007:54). For Christian fundamentalists the inerrancy of the Bible is paramount to their belief system. According to them God speaks directly through the Bible and thus every word is the literal truth (Herriot, 2007:48). Herriot (2007:55) argues: “What cannot possibly be entertained is the idea that God’s word is in any sense mistaken [because] the inerrancy of scripture is one of the basic and non-negotiable beliefs which are the foundation of fundamentalist doctrine.” However, the secular world has constantly challenged the literal truth of the Bible through the use of science. This has added to the growing antagonism towards the secular world.

The beliefs, values and norms of religious fundamentalists are based on their holy book and thus very clearly defined. This becomes a tool for distinction and a way to stereotype the out-group. Those who do not adhere to the beliefs, values and norms as described by the only authentic holy book are regarded as godless adherents to the secular world.

Through this the fundamentalists “achieve maximum similarity within the group and maximum differentiation from the world” (Herriot, 2007:33). This leads to a strengthening of the in-group’s identity and an intensification of out-group stereotypes (Herriot, 2007:33). According to Herriot (2007:33) maximum differentiation makes the occurrence of conflict more probable.

According to Armstrong (2004:270), “in order to mobilize effectively, a group needs an ideology with a clearly defined enemy.” The out-group is chosen based on its relevance to the in-group. The degree of security that the in-group feels in relation to the out-group is also an important determinant of the choice of out-group. The out-group that is perceived as the biggest threat to the in-group will become the primary out-group (Herriot, 2007:34). For religious fundamentalists the secular world poses the biggest threat to their in-group and has thus become an all-encompassing out-group. According to social identity theory an actual or perceived threat to the group and its members can inspire aggression and sometimes violent conflict. In a society where modern values and science has undermined so many beliefs of the fundamentalists they must constantly feel threatened. Therefore, according to the fundamentalists they are involved in conflict - they are struggling for survival in a secular world (Herriot, 2007:94).

According to Herriot (2007:36) “group members’ perception of their own group, their out-groups and the comparisons they make between them relating to status have a potent effect upon the strength and salience of their group social identity and hence their commitment to act on its behalf.” If members perceive their group to be of higher status, they identify more strongly with it and this leads to greater commitment to the in-group. A perception of one’s own group as a minority will evoke the same feelings. Herriot (2007:36) argues that “the tendency of fundamentalists to perceive themselves a minority under threat of destruction by secular society is thus in reality an effective survival mechanism.” In order to ensure continued survival many religious fundamentalist groups have taken a militant stand against the out-group(s).

### **2.3.2 Religious Fundamentalist Militancy**

According to Herriot (2007:28) people will believe that they belong to a group very easily and thus acquire a social identity based on the group's identity. By believing to belong to a group and taking on the group identity as your own, the individual's identity and the group identity becomes one. This means that should the group's identity be threatened in any way every member's identity will also be threatened. In case of religious fundamentalists this threat is likely to come from the secular world. A threat to an individual's identity and self-esteem may very well lead to aggression. From here on conflict is a likely option for retaliation (Herriot, 2007:27).

According to Armstrong (2004:178) fundamentalism "exists in a symbiotic relationship with an aggressive liberalism or secularism, and, under attack, invariably becomes more extreme, bitter, and excessive." Militant Christian fundamentalists hold the belief that being a Christian must involve more than verbal declaration of belief in the Bible (Knitter, 2002:22). In other words, it must involve action as well. Despite the fact that Christianity's central teachings revolve around love and peace the religion has had a violent side. Armstrong (2004:65) argues that fundamentalism has in some circumstances evolved into a religion "in which the love of God is often balanced by a hatred of other human beings." In both the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible one can find a vivid portrayal of violent conflict. Often it is in these portrayals that Christian fundamentalists find justification for their violent acts committed in the name of religion (Juergensmeyer, 2001:19-20). It is not unheard of that Christian fundamentalists justify their violent acts as something that God approves of. For instance, Kerry Noble, a former leader of a religious fundamentalist group in the United States, called God "a man of war" while another activist of the same group proclaimed that the Bible is "a book of war, a book of hate" (Juergensmeyer, 2001:145-146). These types of groups believe in the concept of "divine warfare", a concept that calls both for religious activism by means of violence as well as provide the perpetrators with a justification for their acts (Juergensmeyer, 2001:146). If militant religious fundamentalism has taught us anything it is that if an individual was under the impression that his/her violent acts "had been



sanctioned by a divine mandate” this individual is capable of doing “virtually anything” (Juergensmeyer, 2001:216).

For militant Christian fundamentalists “God’s rules permit, nay require, violent assault on the secular world... violent fundamentalists are simply acting on the basis of their worldview” (Herriot, 2007:16). By creating an enemy and fighting to establish their ideal society fundamentalist movements create a purpose for their lives and an “inspiring vision of the future” (Herriot, 2007:14). The enemy is dehumanised by viewing individuals as representatives of modernism and the secular world instead of viewing them as innocent civilians. Any successful attack also brings them a sense of victory and power and thus enhanced group identification and self-esteem (Herriot, 2007:15).

Fundamentalist militancy is mainly a reaction to modernity and the infiltration of secular ideas into society (Appleby, 2000:87). Castells (2004:13) is also of opinion that religious fundamentalists are “reactive and reactionary.” He argues that “fundamentalists long for the security of traditional values and institutions rooted in God’s eternal truth” (Castells, 2004:24). According to the fundamentalists the most dangerous enemies are those that undermine the traditional values of family which is considered as “the main source of social stability, Christian life, and personal fulfillment” (Castells, 2004:27). Therefore, their primary targets include homosexuals, feminists, evolutionists, and those who consider themselves as pro-choice with regards to abortion. Castells (2004:29) argues: “The American patriarchal family is indeed in crisis according to all indicators of divorce, separation, violence in the family, children born out of wedlock, delayed marriages, shrinking motherhood, single lifestyles, gay and lesbian couples, and the widespread rejection of patriarchal authority.” This poses a real threat to the beliefs, values and norms of the fundamentalist community. It can also be derived from this that pluralism and political liberalism is not something they endorse (Herriot, 2007:13).

Religious fundamentalists are probably most notorious for their militancy. However, this is a common mistaken stereotype for not all religious fundamentalists are militant. There are other options available to these social groups to ensure their survival or deal with the

peculiar position they find themselves in. Between the works of Tajfel and Turner (1979) and Horowitz (2000) at least four options are identified for social groups to deal with invidious comparisons. These options will be the topic of the following chapter where each option will be outlined and illustrated through the use of relevant examples from the Christian faith.

## **Options for Dealing with Invidious Comparisons**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In-groups measure themselves in comparison to chosen out-groups. There are mainly two reasons why social comparisons are so important to social groups. First, by comparing themselves with an out-group the in-group is able to differentiate their own social identity. A clearly defined social identity reduces uncertainty. Secondly, the more distinct the in-group finds themselves to be, the greater is their self-esteem by way of comparison. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979:43) status “reflects a group’s relative position on some evaluative dimension.” The lower a group’s position is on this evaluative dimension, the lower its members’ social identity will be (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:43). There are several ways in which groups or members of a group can address a low social identity. These are referred to by Tajfel and Turner (1979) as the options for dealing with invidious comparisons. This will be the main theme of this chapter where each of these options will be discussed in detail within the context of religious social groups. Examples that will be provided for each option were found specifically within the Christian experiences, both past and present.

The options for dealing with invidious comparisons, as provided by Tajfel and Turner (1979) will be discussed in sections 3.2 to 3.5. The first option is individual mobility where the example of changes in religious affiliation in the United States will be discussed as an example. The second option is social creativity. This category is subdivided into three possible options: (a) creating a new dimension of comparison, where the Thirty Years’ War and the Peace of Westphalia will be provided as an example; (b) changing the rankings, where two alternative possibilities of changing the rankings will be discussed, (i) modernise, and (ii) transforming the negative to the positive; and (c) changing the out-group, where (i) the example of religious fundamentalists in the United

States will be provided and (ii) the possibility of creating a global collective consciousness will be explored. The third option for dealing with invidious comparison is social competition. The examples discussed under this section will be: (i) competition between the Congregationalists and Anglicans for the establishment of a Bishop in colonial America, and (ii) competition for political power in Virginia. The fourth option is reactionary violence, where the example of Christian fundamentalism in the United States will be provided.

Before the options for dealing with invidious comparisons can be discussed, it is important to note that all of these options can be pursued within one of two belief systems: (1) social mobility, and (2) social change. The distinction between these two strategies will be made in the following section.

### **3.1.2 Social Mobility and Social Change**

A group that finds itself in a position of negative evaluation and, thus, low self-esteem for its members is presumed to be in an unsatisfactory position. The group has several options of remedying its position vis-à-vis the out-groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:27). When the individual views their social identity in a negative light they can “respond to the resulting psychological discomfort with one or more individual or group-level strategies to establish positive identity” (Seul, 1999:557). These strategies are based on two belief systems: social mobility and social change.

The belief system of social mobility refers to “the nature and the structure of the relations between social groups in society” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:35). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979) those who adhere to a belief in social mobility are of the opinion that society is “flexible and permeable,” meaning if an individual is not satisfied with the in-group and the norms, values, beliefs and conditions attached to membership of this group, it is possible for the individual to move to another group which suits them better. Social mobility is a strategy for the individual to attain higher status. It is not a group strategy (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:35). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979:44) low status and an unsatisfactory social identity will “promote the widespread adoption of individual

mobility strategies.” But if the barriers to leaving one’s group are strong, low status and an unsatisfactory social identity will most likely lead to the use of social change strategies.

The belief system of social change “implies that the nature and structure of the relations between social groups in society is perceived as characterized by marked stratification” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:35). Under this belief system it is almost impossible for the individual to dissociate from the current in-group. In cases where a group follows a strategy to enhance group identity it will be due to the fact that leaving the group is difficult or impossible. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979:35) this is often the case “when social identity is based to any significant extent upon persistent social constructions” such as race, nationality or gender. One cannot change one’s race, nationality or gender and if group membership rests on one of these important factors one simply cannot dissociate from the group or change groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:35). Religious convictions and religious affiliations often fall within this category (Seul, 1999:557). The belief system of social change inspires entire groups to better their status. The group as a whole needs to employ a strategy to move up in the status hierarchy in order to provide its members with a positive sense of self (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:35).

The options for dealing with invidious comparisons rely on these two belief systems in order to achieve higher status, either as an individual (social mobility) or as a group (social change). Under each discussed option the current writer will stipulate which of these two belief systems are promoted for the achievement of higher status. This will be provided to orientate the reader to better identify from which point of view the option should be evaluated.

### **3.2 Individual Mobility**

The first option for dealing with invidious comparisons is individual mobility. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979:43) an individual that approaches the structure of beliefs as that of social mobility will be more likely to leave or dissociate himself from the in-group. This is usually in an attempt to achieve upward social mobility, in other words,

the individual joins a group with higher status which provides its members with a positive social identity. A group that ranks low in the hierarchy of status often fails to provide its members with a positive sense of self (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:43). Tajfel and Turner (1979:43) states that “the most important feature of individual mobility is that the low status of one’s own group is not thereby changed: it is an individualist approach to achieve a personal, not a group solution.” It requires ‘disidentification’ and dissociation from the current in-group.

Differences in theological opinion have generated much hatred and violence, not only in our lives, but for centuries that came before us. This is the view of authors such as Sam Harris (2006 & 2007) and Richard Dawkins (2006). These authors are convinced that a world without religion will be much more peaceful than a world where religion regulates the lives of billions. Thus, these authors promote a strategy of individual mobility. In the following section the author will rely on the works of Harris and Dawkins to explain how individual mobility can help to deal with invidious comparisons – especially within the paradigms of religion.

Dawkins (2006:23-24) urges the reader to imagine, as John Lennon famously wrote, a world with no religion. The people of this imagined world will not be walking around with memories of 9/11 or 7/7, they would not be walking around with the knowledge that somewhere another suicide bomber is getting ready to go to Paradise, they would carry no knowledge of the Crusades, witch hunts, the Israeli/Palestinian wars, or the Irish ‘Troubles’. According to Dawkins and Harris this world can become a reality as long as we are prepared to not only adopt a strategy of individual mobility, but to completely let go of religion, and become non-believers.

In order for the individual to rid him/herself of religion, authors such as Harris and Dawkins do not necessarily want the individual to question their religion, as Armstrong (2006) promotes, in order to modernise, they rather want the individual to question the existence of God. It is important to note the difference here. Armstrong’s (2006) argument is that believers should question their religion in order to modernise it, basically

keep up with the times, but stay a believer. Harris and Dawkins want the individual to move on, rid him/herself of religion to become a non-believer.

Harris provides four main reasons why the individual should become a non-believer. The first reason provided by the author for the religious individual to become a non-believer, and not just join a different religion, is that religion in itself is the problem. According to Harris (2006) religion facilitates, almost necessitates intolerance. Harris (2006:85) states: “Whenever a man imagines that he need only believe the truth of a proposition, without evidence – that unbelievers will go to hell, that Jews drink the blood of infants – he becomes capable of anything.” An individual who is truly devoted to his religion has no other choice than to believe it is superior to other religions as true faith inspires immense certainty (Harris, 2006:130). Harris (2007:3) argues that “to be a true Christian is to believe that all other faiths are mistaken, and profoundly so.” The more certain an individual is of religious ‘truth’ the more intolerant this individual will be towards those that do not share his faith (Harris, 2006:86). Harris (2006:86) provides a fitting quote from Will Durant which reads: “Intolerance is the natural concomitant of strong faith; tolerance grows only when faith loses certainty; certainty is murderous.” Thus, Harris provides the ultimate reason for ridding yourself of religion. It breeds intolerance, sometimes even murderous intolerance. The worldviews provided by the religions of this world is in essence incompatible and therefore it is not enough to simply change your religion, the individual needs to become a non-believer (Harris, 2007:87).

The second reason to let go of religion is because of its non-progressive nature. According to Harris (2006:21) the very fact that religion is in general not progressive is enough reason to let go of it for good. He supports his argument by creating the following hypothetical situation:

“Imagine we could revive a well-educated Christian of the fourteenth century... His beliefs about geography, astronomy, and medicine would embarrass even a child, but he would know more or less everything there is to know about God... Though he would be considered a fool to think that the earth is the center of the cosmos... his religious ideas would still be beyond reproach.”

Harris (2006:22) provides two explanations for the lack of progress in the area of religion – more specifically Christianity. The first possible explanation is that the religion was perfected two thousand years ago. Of course, Harris proves to be very skeptical of this point. The second explanation, one that Harris endorses more vigorously, is that “religion is one area of discourse that does not permit progress” (Harris, 2006:22).

The third reason to rid oneself of religion is the lack of evidence that supports religious belief. Harris (2006:45) is of opinion that the time has come to admit no sufficient evidence exists that any holy book was authored by the creator of the universe. It was written by people who considered the world to be flat. Harris (2006:45) states: “To rely on such a document as the basis for our worldview is to repudiate two thousand years of civilizing insights that the human mind has only just begun to inscribe upon itself through secular politics and scientific culture.” The many blows that science has dealt to biblical ‘truths’ should be enough to persuade individuals to admit to the lack of evidence underlying their religious beliefs. Admittance to the lack of evidence should inspire the abandonment of religious beliefs.

The fourth and final reason to rid oneself of religion is because it is threatening to the continued survival of the people of this world. Harris (2006:47) urges the religious individual to become a non-believer. He is of opinion that this is a necessary step in order for civilisation to have any chance of survival. In a slightly dramatic fashion Harris (2006:47) states: “Two-hundred years from now when we are a thriving civilization... something about us will have changed: it must have; otherwise, we would have killed ourselves ten times over before this day ever dawned.” What Harris is referring to is the possibility of absolute warfare based on religious beliefs – warfare driven by the violent intolerance religion often inspires. Harris (2006:225) argues: “If religious war is ever to become unthinkable for us... it will be a matter of our having dispensed with the dogma of faith.” In other words, to avoid religious war the world needs to rid itself of religion.

Although Harris (2007:81) provides a host of reasons to let go of religion he admits that “the prospects for eradicating religion in our time do not seem good.” Dawkins builds on



this argument by providing two reasons why most people are reluctant to let go of religion. The first reason is that childhood indoctrination has made religious individuals immune to argument. The problem is that convincing a religious fundamentalist to let go of his religion is not a simple task, it may even prove to be an impossible one. This is due to the fact that religion often takes a form of childhood indoctrination which allows the individual to build up resistance against criticism of their beliefs and therefore, as Dawkins (2006:28) states, “there will always be dyed-in-the-wool faith-heads [who] are immune to argument.” This also partly explains why “there is no position on which people are so immovable as their religious beliefs” (Dawkins, 2006:60).

The second reason Dawkins provide for the reluctance of the individual to let go of their religion is because of outright fear. Blaise Pascal summed it up well when he said: “However long the odds against might be, there is an even larger asymmetry in the penalty for guessing wrong” (Dawkins, 2006:130). What Pascal referred to was the fact that in believing in God there is nothing to lose, because if you are wrong and God does not exist it will not make a difference. But should you choose not to believe in God and it turns out you are wrong, it results in eternal damnation. The solution to this problem is simple: Believe in God.

According to Harris (2006:48) “it is imperative that we begin speaking plainly about the absurdity of most of our religious beliefs.” Harris, as well as Dawkins, urge the religious individual to allow scientific fact to persuade him/her to rid themselves of religion. But Harris (2006:61) admits that “human beings are generally reluctant to change their minds.” This poses a problem for the successful adoption of individual mobility strategies as specifically promoted by Harris and Dawkins. Harris (2006:223) states that “religious faith is the one species of human ignorance that will not admit of even the possibility of correction.” It is simply because, for these individuals, there is nothing to correct as they already know the truth.

### **3.2.1 Changes in Religious Affiliation in the United States**

In April 2009 the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released a report entitled *'Faith in Flux: Changes in Religious Affiliation in the U.S.'* This document contained the results of a countrywide survey which aimed to determine trends of changes in religious affiliation. The survey found that Americans change their religious affiliation often. It was determined that close to half of all American adults have changed religious affiliation at least once in their lifetime (Pew Forum, 2009:1). The survey showed that religious change begins early in life. Most individuals who decide to leave their childhood religion do so before the age of 24. It also showed that the large majority of the adult population joined their current religion before the age of 36 while very few changes in religious affiliation were reported for individuals above the age of 50 (Pew Forum, 2009:4). This can be attributed to the psychological term 'sunk-cost effect' which refers to the fact that humans "feel reluctant to abandon a policy in which [they] have already invested heavily" (Diamond, 2005:432).

With regard to the relevance of individual mobility there are a few interesting findings that needs to be highlighted. First, the group that has shown the largest growth over recent years is the unaffiliated population. The unaffiliated population includes atheists, agnostics, those who have no faith in particular, those who still feel religion is important but are currently unaffiliated, and the unaffiliated secularists. While only 7 percent of the current unaffiliated population were raised unaffiliated this population now comprise 16 percent of the total adult population of the U.S. But although this group has shown the largest growth, it also has the lowest retention rate. Those individuals who are unaffiliated are often just part of this particular population until they find a religion that suits their needs better (Pew Forum, 2009:8). Reasons provided for becoming affiliated again are that spiritual needs were not met or the individual found a religion they liked more than being unaffiliated (Pew Forum, 2009:18).

As has been mentioned, about 16 percent of the total adult population of the U.S. is currently unaffiliated. The vast majority, about 79 percent, of this population were raised in a religion (Pew Forum, 2009:10). The two main reasons provided for becoming

unaffiliated are not believing in God or most religious teachings anymore or not having found the right religion yet (Pew Forum, 2009:12). Other relevant reasons cited for becoming unaffiliated is that “religious organizations focus too much on rules and not enough on spirituality [and] religious leaders are more concerned with money and power than they are with truth and spirituality” (Pew Forum, 2009:13). About 32 percent agree that science proves religion to be superstition but very few cited this as the main reason for conversion (Pew Forum, 2009:13). It should also be mentioned that a total of 4 percent of the U.S. adult population who were raised unaffiliated now belong to a religious group (Pew Forum, 2009:17).

A second interesting result is that the Catholic Church seems to have the lowest retention rate of all major religions. The Catholic Church in the U.S. has been losing a great number of members seemingly because of a lack of modernisation. A large number of former Catholics left because they were dissatisfied with Catholic teachings on abortion, homosexuality, and birth control, and also because of unhappiness with Catholicism’s treatment of women (Pew Forum, 2009:9).

The third, and final, interesting finding relevant to the argument of individual mobility is that the “single largest group in this adult population that has changed affiliation is made up of those who have changed from one Protestant denominational family to another” (Pew Forum, 2009:9). About 15 percent of those individuals who were raised Protestant have changed their denomination, however, the most common reasons for such a change is moving to a new community or marrying someone from a different religious background. Protestants are also least likely to change their denomination due to “a loss of belief in the religion’s teachings” (Pew Forum, 2009:9).

Protestantism in the U.S. has the highest retention rate of all major religions. About 8 out of 10 adults who were raised Protestant are still Protestant while two-thirds of this group belong to the same denomination in which they were raised (Pew Forum, 2009:30). The majority of Christian fundamentalists in the U.S. are Protestant denominations. It is important to take this into account when a strategy of individual mobility is promoted to

deal with invidious comparisons. As the Pew Forum shows, Protestants are most reluctant to completely change their religion, however, they are most likely to join a different denomination of their religion. But then it should also be taken into account that there are so many denominations available for choice in their religion. There are about 33 000 Protestant denominations worldwide – about 4500 in the U.S. alone (Barrett, Kurian & Johnson, 2001:12). No other religion offers such an array of options for their members as Protestantism does.

According to Mark Silk, a Professor of religion in public life at Trinity College, major fluxes in religious affiliation is no new phenomena: “The sense that there is a huge amount of flux where there was not before is not accurate. In the nineteenth century there was a huge amount of switching around and the establishment of new denominations” (Greene, 2009). It seems as if the option of individual mobility has been around in religious circles for quite some time. The sheer amount of denominations within the different religious groups not only allows the pursuit of the option of individual mobility, the growth of the number of religious denominations within the nineteenth century illustrates the existence of this strategy within the religious paradigm and the successful pursuit thereof.

What this study has been able to knowingly, or unknowingly, illustrate is the fact that American adults often change from one religious affiliation to another but less often completely rid themselves of religion. Many of those who fall within the unaffiliated population see themselves as being in between religions rather than completely without religion. According to the Pew Forum (2009:8) about 4 out of 10 people within the unaffiliated population say that religion is still “somewhat important in their lives” while at least one in three of the unaffiliated claim to have not found the right religion yet. Thus, many people still leave the option open for joining or rejoining a religion one day (Pew Forum, 2009:8).

A researcher at the Pew Forum explained the flux in religious affiliation quite accurately when he argued: “You’re seeing the free market at work. If people are dissatisfied they

will leave.” This is a very important observation that should be kept in mind. While Harris and Dawkins are keen promoters of the elimination of religion, the Pew Forum survey has illustrated the impossibility of such a reality. What the survey illustrated was a “decrease in brand-loyalty” (Taylor, 2009). But more importantly the survey illustrated that people do not move away from religion completely but rather prefer to replace their old religion with a new one (Taylor, 2009). This survey illustrated most importantly that people generally need religion, and all that accompanies it, in their lives.

### **3.3 Social Creativity**

The second option for dealing with invidious comparisons is social creativity. This option is approached within the belief system of social change. It is a group strategy to improve the position of the entire social group. Tajfel and Turner (1979:43) describe social creativity as group members seeking for positive distinctiveness for the in-group “by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation.” Three sub-options are identified by Tajfel and Turner under this heading and will be discussed in this section. These are (a) comparing the in-group to the out-group on some new dimension; (b) changing the values assigned to the attributes of the group, so that comparisons which were previously negative are now perceived as positive; and (c) changing the out-group.

It is important to note that religious fundamentalists often engage in social creativity to better their group’s status. There are several reasons for this. Religious fundamentalists may feel that their identity is being undermined by the secular world and leads to lower status. This will increase feelings of insecurity. Due to single truth claims the group members cannot leave the group to join another in an effort to achieve higher status. On the other hand, some religious fundamentalist groups care little what the secular world think of them because the secular world is illegitimate in their eyes. All that matters is their own perception of their status. Being chosen by God to do his will is enough to instate their superiority in relation to other groups (Herriot, 2007:34-36).

### **3.3.1 New Dimension of Comparison**

The first sub-option of social creativity is creating a new dimension of comparison. Research has established that groups tend to compare with others on a dimension that reflects favourably to the in-group. This helps to achieve a sense of higher status and a positive sense of self for group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:43). When the accepted dimension of comparison no longer reflects the in-group in a positive light, the in-group can change the dimension of comparison. They can find a new dimension of comparison that would reflect them in a positive light, a dimension that would make them appear to be superior to the group of comparison. The main problem that presents itself here is the problem of “legitimizing the value assigned to the new social products – first in the in-group and then in the other groups involved” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:43). A new dimension of comparison may threaten the superior position of the out-group and this can cause increased intergroup tension (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:43). The very fact that the new dimension of comparison may threaten the superior position of the out-group would make it all the more difficult to legitimise this new dimension of comparison.

The dimension of comparison can be changed for different reasons but it always involves a change in the most salient dimension of comparison. Therefore, it is not an easy strategy to pursue and in history one can find only rare cases of instances where the most salient dimension of comparison was changed. However, a few examples can be provided to illustrate instances where a social group successfully changed the most salient dimension of comparison.

The first example is the case of Tikopia. This tiny isolated island in the Southwest Pacific ocean covers an area of 1.8 square miles. Through subsistence farming the peoples of Tikopia has been able to continuously occupy the island for almost 3000 years. The peoples of this island have constantly had to address two very important problems relating to their survival. One is to supply sufficient food for the population and, two is to control the population as the island can only sustain a population of about 1600 people (Diamond, 2005:287,286). It is said that around 100 B.C. the Tikopians started an “intensive husbandry of pigs” (Diamond, 2005:292). The pigs became a

luxury food for the Chiefs and one of the most important sources of proteins. The pigs were not only sources of protein but also symbols of status and wealth, and were predominantly owned by the Chiefs (Firth, 1959:37). Firth (1959:153) reports that “the possession of money in Tikopia was not regarded as a significant sign of wealth. Wealth lay in the possession of goods.” But due to an overall destruction of crops and arable land as a result of the presence of the pigs, a conscious decision was made to kill all the pigs around 1600 A.D. (Diamond, 2005:292). This decision was made in order to ensure the continued survival of the Tikopians.

During his fieldwork on the island Firth (1936:373) also made the observation that descent was considered much more important than wealth, especially in terms of marriage. For instance, there was “a barrier on marriage between Chiefs and commoners” which was regulated by descent, not wealth (Firth, 1936:373). Based on these observations it could well be argued that the Tikopians changed their dimension of comparison, or were rather forced to change their most salient dimension of comparison, for continued survival. The status and wealth as previously symbolised by the pig were replaced by the importance of descent and family lineage.

Another example is the case of Iceland which used to be self-governing. In the early thirteenth century fighting broke out between the Chiefs belonging to the five leading families. Of course, to become the ruler of Iceland was a position of great status and prestige and thus a very sought after position. This fighting resulted in the killing of people and the burning of farms. Eventually, in 1262 the Icelanders invited Norway’s king Hakon Hakonarson to govern them. The Icelandic Chiefs forfeited the position of ultimate ruler and this resulted in a change in the most salient dimension of comparison. From now on they would no longer compete for the prestigious position of ruler of Iceland. The invitation to Norway’s king to govern them was admittance that a distant king “was less of a danger to them, would leave them more freedom, and could not possibly plunge their land into such disorder as their own nearby Chiefs” (Diamond, 2005:202-203).

Finding a religious example where there was a change in the most salient dimension of comparison however, proved to be more challenging as the dimension of comparison often remains within the religious paradigm. But even if comparisons have certainly remained within the religious paradigm there is one example where a definite shift in the dimension of comparison took place. The Peace of Westphalia brought about this new dimension of comparison between the Catholics and Protestants of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A brief overview of the preceding Thirty Years' War and the role of religion within this war are necessary at this stage.

### **3.3.1.1 The Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia**

To comprehend the nature of the Thirty Years' War it is important to have an "appreciation of the close links between secular and religious issues" (Rabb, 1968:33). Rabb (1968:33) explains: "For baroque man religion and politics were cut from the same cloth, indeed the most intensely political issues were precisely the religious ones." It is with this background that we now turn to the Thirty Years' War and its impact on the Catholics and Protestants.

Although the Thirty Years' War only started in 1618 when a group of Bohemian leaders launched a rebellion against the Hapsburgs in order to destroy the Holy Roman Empire, it is also important to briefly investigate the events leading up to the start of the war (Rabb, 1968:vii). The initial tensions that were to evolve into the Thirty Years' War can be traced all the way back to 1555 when the Peace of Augsburg established the principle of *cujus region ejus religio* (of whom the region of him the religion). This principle permitted every prince to "enforce either the Catholic or the Lutheran faith in his lands so that subjects who could not conform must emigrate" (Rabb, 1968:15). This principle also included a modification which stated that a conversion to Protestantism by any ruling prelate, abbot, bishop or archbishop will result in an immediate loss of the ruling position (Rabb, 1968:16). Rabb (1968:15) explains that although the Peace of Augsburg "saved the theory of religious unity for each state" it destroyed similar prospects for the Empire.



Over the course of the following decades it became clear to both the Catholics and the Protestants that due to the fact that every state had to follow the religion of their prince gaining territory was of great importance to establishing the superiority of their faith. Thus, this became their most salient dimension of comparison. As a result force became “the proof of true faith” (Rabb, 1968:16).

The period between the Peace of Augsburg and the Bohemian rebellion was characterised by a tremendous growth in Protestantism and a revival of Catholicism. Rabb (1968:11) explains that the first years of Reformation “had forced many of [the Catholic rulers] to make concessions to their Protestant subjects, so that, officially at least, there were more Protestant communities in Catholic countries than were Catholics in Protestant ones.” Differences and tensions within the Empire seemed to have multiplied (Rabb, 1968:vii). Especially between 1608 and 1610 the immense tension between the Catholics and Protestants began to show. First the Union of Protestant princes was formed followed by the establishment of the League of Catholic princes (Rabb, 1968:xiii). According to Rabb (1968:vii-viii) the formation of the Union of Protestant princes and the establishment of the League of Catholic princes was “seen as a crystallization of the two sides which were to fight as soon as the pretext of the Bohemian revolt presented itself.” Three events within this time are especially important. The first event was the outbreak of a riot between Catholics and Protestants in 1608 at Donauwörth, a city on the Danube, which kept the Empire on the edge of disaster for months. The second event was the insurrection in Bohemia in 1609 which “forced the Emperor to guarantee religious freedom in that country” (Rabb, 1968:17). The third event was when the Duke of Cleves-Jülich died without heirs in 1610. This caused tension when two possible claimants, one Catholic and one Protestant, were identified and the Emperor immediately ordered his troops to occupy the district (Rabb, 1968:17).

In 1618, as a result of increasing Catholic pressure, there was a revolt in Bohemia and the Protestant Union sent their troops to support the cause. This revolt initiated the Thirty Years’ War (Rabb, 1968:xiv). A host of constant conflicts in the Empire ensued over the

next thirty years. Some were more religiously motivated than others but in essence there was a struggle for territory and the establishment of either Catholicism or Protestantism.

The Bohemian War (1618-27) revolved around the dispute over the throne of Bohemia – a predominantly Protestant kingdom. The Habsburgs claimed that “the crown fell by heredity to the Holy Roman Empire” (Buisseret, 1969:92). In 1620 the imperial armies entered Bohemia and by 1627 Bohemia was the possession of the Habsburgs and Catholicism was established as the only permitted religion (Buisseret, 1969:94).

In the Danish War (1625-29) the focus fell on the Rhineland where the Habsburgs also enjoyed great success when they were recognised as the ruler over this region. The Emperor Ferdinand took advantage of this position and issued the ‘edict of restitution’ which stated that all properties seized since 1552 shall be returned to the old church. Through this Ferdinand was able to re-establish the power of Catholicism in northern and north-western Germany (Buisserat, 1969:94-95).

The Swedish Phase (1630-34) of the war was retaliation by Gustaves Adolphus of Sweden to “save the [German] provinces from Habsburg tyranny” and to re-establish Protestantism in the region (Buisserat, 1969:95-96).

The French Phase (1635-48), also the last phase before the Peace of Westphalia, was not so much concerned with the religious aspects as seen in the previous conflicts. In the early sixteen-forties it became evident that the participators were ready to negotiate a peace-settlement (Buisserat, 1969:97-98).

In 1648 a number of peace treaties were signed and became known as the Peace of Westphalia (Rabb, 1968:xvii). The most important settlements relating to religion was, first of all, the abandoning of the principle of *cujus regio ejus religio*. Subjects were now allowed freedom of worship except in the hereditary Habsburg lands (Buisserat, 1969:98). It was also established that all imperial institutions were, from then on, “to be composed on a footing of religious equality” (Steinberg, 1966:82). Another important

development was the independence of Estates. The Emperor stated that “all Estates should be admitted as fully qualified representatives of the Empire and as independent members of the society of European states” (Steinberg, 1966:78). In other words, Estates were granted full sovereignty. According to Steinberg (1966:83) the Peace of Westphalia “marked a definite step towards the separation of politics and religion. Politics became secularized, religion was to be left to the conscience of the individual.”

The Thirty Years’ War is viewed by many as “the last of the religious wars” (Rabb, 1968:vii). Rabb (1968:18) argues: “After the expenditure of so much human life to so little purpose... they rejected religion as an object to fight for and found others.” In other words, they changed the most salient dimension of comparison and found a new one. Rabb (1968:4) argues that the discord continued between the two faiths “but utter[ed] itself no longer in bloody conflict.” According to Rabb (1968:4) “while Catholics and Protestants maintained their earlier zeal for their faith, their convictions of the truth of their opinions and the errors of their opponents were of a kind which, in our time, we seek in vain, even in men of most rigid beliefs.”

### **3.3.2 Changing the Rankings**

The second sub-option of social creativity is to change the rankings. This option involves the rejection or reversal of the established value system by the in-group. This means that the main characteristic that used to have a negative connotation is now perceived as positive by the in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:43). The example provided by Tajfel and Turner (1979:43) is the classic ‘Black is beautiful’. In this case the main characteristic was the race of the group. The negative connotation attributed to this characteristic by out-groups was rejected and the in-group attributed a positive connotation to the very same characteristic.

In the secular and ‘modern’ world it is often the case that religious fundamentalists are viewed as backward, outdated, or ill-fitted for modern social structures. Therefore, there is a general negative connotation to those individuals or groups who are classified as religious fundamentalists. Of course, being a religious fundamentalist requires the

individual to return to the fundamentals, in other words, it is a deliberate failure to modernise. This anti-modernisation attitude is therefore central to their identity but also the main point of criticism from the secular world. Thus, religious fundamentalists find themselves in a dilemma and are presented with two alternatives to change the rankings. The first, but also the less desirable alternative, is to modernise their religion in order to have the entire religion viewed by others as higher up in the rankings of all collective religions. But this alternative poses many problems of which the biggest problem is probably the fact that these religious fundamentalists will have to completely change their religious identity as they would have to let go of the central aspect of their identity – their fundamentals. The second, and probably more appealing alternative, is to turn the characteristics which previously had a negative connotation into a positive connotation. These two alternatives provided for changing the rankings will be discussed in the light of Christian fundamentalists in the following paragraphs.

### **3.3.2.1 Modernise**

Religious fundamentalist groups in general are questioned and threatened by a more powerful order – the secular world. According to Elizondo (1985:96-97) the dominant order often tries to help the group considered to be inferior “to ‘improve’ by ceasing to be who they are” and become more like the dominant groups, in other words, they need to modernise in order to fit in.

In Hegel’s *‘The Phenomenology of Mind’* (1807) he promotes a message of modernisation as a cure for the alienation felt by so many people. According to Hegel we live in a world that is “continually re-creating itself” (Armstrong, 2004:93). Armstrong (2004:93-94) sums it up well when she states: “Hegel envisaged a dialectical process in which human beings were constantly engaged in the destruction of past ideas that had once been sacred and incontrovertible.” Hegel envisaged a world that was constantly undergoing a process of evolution, a world that was striving towards new truths and not constantly returning to the fundamentals (Armstrong, 2004:94).

According to Armstrong (2006:295) religion should not be stagnant, it should evolve just as its surroundings evolve. This was also the view of the Axial sages. Armstrong (2006:295) writes: “When they [the Axial sages] confronted aggression in their own traditions, they did not pretend that it was not there but worked vigorously to change their religion, rewriting and reorganizing their rituals and scriptures in order to eliminate the violence that accumulated over the years.” Religion is not a sacred entity that should be kept untouched for the sake of tradition. We need to re-evaluate and ask probing questions in order to find out whether our beliefs are still applicable to modern times – is it still relevant in helping us deal with the current state of the world? Brümmer (2007:47-48) promotes the same idea as Armstrong in terms of modernisation, he writes: “the faith of a religious tradition needs to be continually re-focused, re-interpreted and re-conceptualized in different ways in order to remain relevant for the changing demands of life.” Brümmer (2007:44) argues that “religious traditions are not monolithic and immutable systems of thought but allows for various ways of understanding the meaning and significance of life and the world.” In other words, religious traditions allow for modernisation, it almost necessitates it. In order to remain relevant and adequate religion “require[s] translation, re-conceptualization and re-interpretation” (Brümmer, 2007:46). Brümmer (2007:48) argues that religious tradition needs to “address the issues and demands which arise in the ever changing situations in which believers find themselves.”

According to Kimball (2008:109) freedom of intellectual thinking and honest enquiry should be encouraged within religious traditions. But Kimball (2008:69) argues, we should not expect such a questioning of truth, at least not within Christianity. He states that his experience “reinforces the view that most Christians don’t grow up learning to ask basic questions about their own sacred texts” (Kimball, 2008:69). The possible reason for this is that to a religious individual who believes to adhere to the teachings of the only authentic religion, it would be an absolute sin to even entertain the possibility of their religion not being the only ‘true’ religion. It would simply be considered as George Orwell’s (1949) concept of a ‘thoughtcrime’.

Criticism of the Bible has rarely been welcomed by the Christian fundamentalists. This was already evident when a group of Anglican clergyman started to publish 'Essays and Reviews' which contained the latest biblical criticism. This group of clergymen became known as 'The Higher Criticism' (Armstrong, 2004:95). In this case it becomes evident that Richard Hofstadter had a point when he claimed that "single-minded commitment to one idea inspires hostility towards liberal inquiry" (Boone, 1989:6).

According to Dawkins (2006:42) the fundamental mistake that society makes is to accept that "religious faith is especially vulnerable to offence and should be protected by an abnormally thick wall of respect." Offence is much more easily taken when arguments surrounding religion are engaged in and therefore the majority of humans refuse to challenge the beliefs of their fellow adherents. This makes the process of modernising religion an uphill struggle.

According to Harris (2006:18) religion can only be modernised once adherents are willing and able to ignore at least part of their teachings. For instance, the Bible teaches the stoning of men, women and children for a variety of crimes. The Bible also contains the following passage in Deuteronomy 13:1: "Whatever I am now commanding you, you must keep and observe, adding nothing to it, taking nothing away." Although the stoning of people for crimes committed has gone out of fashion, Christians are still caught in a dilemma. It should be added that the dilemma is so much worse for Christian fundamentalists who believe in the literal truth of the Bible. How can they modernise their religion if it requires ignoring certain parts of their holy book? Harris (2006:18) sums it up well: "This is a problem for 'moderation' in religion: it has nothing underwriting it other than the unacknowledged neglect of the letter of the divine law."

In the light of the previous paragraphs two common problems pertaining to modernisation can be identified. The first is that people are not encouraged to question their holy texts or religious traditions as single truth claims have often overshadowed any thought of doubt (Kimball, 2008:68). The second problem is that even if the individual

was moved to ask questions an obvious lack of objectivity has often hampered the process. Therefore genuine ‘truth’ is often elusive (Kimball, 2008:76).

The refusal of Christian fundamentalists to incorporate secular beliefs has sparked a reactionary stubbornness that has deemed modernisation within this specific religious group all the more problematic. Most religious fundamentalist groups choose to close their boundaries and limit contact to the modern world. They prefer to be exclusive while declaring their singular claim to truth (Fisher, 1999:19). Thus, it is not so simple to persuade these religious fundamentalist groups to modernise. It is, the very act of modernisation that made them close off their boundaries and grab hold of their fundamental beliefs. The very goal of fundamentalists “is to protect their religious identity from modernity and secularists” (Fox & Shmuel, 2004:85).

Seul (1999) identifies another problem concerning modernisation. He argues that “religious groups often demand a high level of commitment from their members, so that it may be extremely difficult to shed one’s religious identity once it is established” (Seul, 1999:559). According to Seul this is one of the main reasons for the prevalence of religious conflict. But it is also one of the key reasons why modernisation may be problematic as an option for dealing with invidious comparisons.

The beliefs of Christian fundamentalists are based on the five fundamentals as already mentioned in Chapter Two. If any of these fundamentals are challenged the Christian fundamentalists perceive it as a threat to their identity. Doubting the core of their belief system is not an option for them and thus they rarely, if ever, question their own beliefs (Herriot, 2007:54). Anything that may pose a challenge to their beliefs is simply false. According to Dawkins (2006:321) religious fundamentalism “teaches us not to change our minds.” Therefore, religious fundamentalism stands in complete opposition with the concept of modernisation. Thus, the beliefs, values and norms on which the fundamentalists’ social identity rests “are highly unlikely to change in the face of conflicting evidence” – especially if this evidence is devised by the secular world which is seen as illegitimate in the eyes of the religious fundamentalist (Herriot, 2007:55).

### **3.3.2.2 Transforming the Negative to the Positive**

According to Elizondo (1985:54) every human society “develop[s] ways of accepting and welcoming some persons while rejecting and downgrading others [and] every society develops its own ways of determining in-groups and out-groups, the normal and the abnormal, the successful and the failures.” These categories will be found in every human society and unfortunately for the Christian fundamentalist they found themselves at the back end of every category as determined by the secular world.

The in-group has the option of redefining the values attached to the group attributes. A previously negative attribute can be redefined as a positive attribute. This can enable the group “to feel superior in terms of their most valued characteristic” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:57). Elizondo (1985) provides the framework for Christians where a previously negative aspect of the social group can be transformed into a positive aspect. Firstly, Elizondo (1985:47) introduces the Gospel Matrix which is based on the premise that all people “still must be judged by the word of the Gospels.” Secondly, Elizondo (1985:53) argues: “What the world rejects, God chooses as his very own.” Elizondo’s argument is based on, what he refers to as, worldly rejection-divine election.

Elizondo (1985:64) argues that “the kingdom of the Father offers a new basis for any given society.” Within the existing social structures God offers a new basis for ranking social groups. God promotes a complete reversal of the existing hierarchy for suddenly it is the backward, the deprived, and the poor who now rank at the very top. In this context, Elizondo distinguishes between three types of poverty: material poverty, psychological poverty, and cultural-spiritual poverty. Material poverty refers to “the lack of the fundamental necessities of life” (Elizondo, 1985:95). Psychological poverty refers to low self-image or even self-hatred as a result of a lack of acceptance, understanding, love or esteem. This is coupled with feelings of inferiority based on “the standards and norms projected by those in control” (Elizondo, 1985:95). Cultural-spiritual poverty “is the deprivation not only of goods or status, but of the very humanity of a racially and culturally determined group,” in other words, the group “has been robbed of its humanity by the group that does the labeling” (Elizondo, 1985:96).



Two types of poverty are relevant when discussing Christian fundamentalists, namely psychological poverty and spiritual-cultural poverty. It is also important to note that ‘those in control’ and ‘the group that does the labeling’ is represented by the dominant secular world. First of all, due to the established standards and norms Christian fundamentalists often lack the acceptance or understanding of the secular world. This leads to possible feelings of inferiority and a lack of self-esteem which results in psychological poverty. Second, the secular world often labels Christian fundamentalists as backward and thus succeeds to deprive the group of their humanity which results in cultural-spiritual poverty. For the provided reasons these two types of poverty – psychological and cultural-spiritual – are intrinsically part of the Christian fundamentalist identity, especially in the developed and secular world.

But all is not lost for the Christian fundamentalist for Luke 6:20 proclaims: “God blesses you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours.” For this reason Elizondo (1985:91) argues: “What human beings reject, God chooses as his very own.” Within the Christian scriptures one can find many signs and suggestions that being poor in any way, or being rejected should not be considered negative but rather as something profoundly positive. For instance, the protagonist of the Christian religion, Jesus Christ, identified with the most rejected of society. In his continued identification with the poor and rejected of society, Jesus “entered and left human society as a reject” (Elizondo, 1985:55). In the eyes of society Jesus Christ was considered a reject. But Jesus rejected rejection and “enable[d] his followers to do likewise” (Elizondo, 1985:92).

Jesus cared greatly for the most rejected of society and according to Elizondo (1985:55) Jesus’ love for the most rejected “is one of the greatest constants of his ministry.” But Jesus provides an explanation for why he favours the rejected. For him “it is evident that the poor, the little ones, and the simple people will be the first ones to understand the love and wisdom of the father; the wise and intelligent of ‘this world’ will be excluded” (Elizondo, 1985:56). Those who are considered inferior by society assumes the top position on the social hierarchy in the eyes of God for they are able to grasp something

that the wise and intelligent, also considered the secular of this world, fails to understand. This ‘understanding’ will also lead to the ultimate prize: access to Heaven – being chosen by God himself. God invites “especially those who have been rejected” into his kingdom (Elizondo, 1985:33). In God’s eyes the only thing that counts in his kingdom “is what is revealed in the heart that opens itself to God... this is the only criterion for belongingness” (Elizondo, 1985:62). However, those who fail to understand or fail to open their hearts to God will be excluded. They will fail to gain access to Heaven and, according to Christian teachings, will burn in Hell for all eternity.

In essence God’s message to the poor and rejected are that they should reject rejection as Jesus did for they are the chosen ones because they opened their hearts to God and this is His only criterion for belongingness. In this way God establishes the superiority of His dedicated followers to all the rest and “offers a new basis for any given society” (Elizondo, 1985:64). According to Elizondo (1985:100) “it is evident from the scriptures that God chooses the outcasts of the world – not exclusively, but certainly in a preferential way.”

The cross that once was a symbol of curse has, through the help of Christian faith, been transformed into “a symbol of divine blessing” (Elizondo, 1985:106). They succeeded to transform a previous negative symbol into a symbol of hope. The Christian religion, in this case, succeeded to change something negative into something positive and the Christian fundamentalists might be able to transform themselves in a similar fashion. Through the words of God it is possible for Christian fundamentalists to challenge the existing social norms of acceptability based on power and prestige (Elizondo, 1985:93). Therefore it is possible for Christian fundamentalists to change the rankings.

### **3.3.3 Changing the Out-Group**

The third sub-option of social creativity is to change the out-group. In order to compare favourably to the out-group the in-group should avoid comparisons with high status groups. Where comparisons with high status groups can lead to feelings of inferiority, comparisons with low status groups can endorse a feeling of relative superiority (Tajfel &

Turner, 1979:43-44). Therefore, when the in-group changes their out-group it usually involves them choosing an out-group with lower status to compare themselves to. Self-esteem is higher where comparisons are made with low-status groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:44). To illustrate their point Tajfel and Turner (1979) use the example of African Americans in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. They found that “self-esteem was higher among blacks who made self-comparisons with other blacks rather than whites” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:44). In other words, African Americans had to change their out-group in order to compare favourably and, at the same time, enhance their self-esteem.

In the following sections two examples will be provided. The first example involves a scenario where the in-group changed its out-group. The Christian fundamentalists in the United States will be used to illustrate such an example. The transition of colonial America to independent, secular United States of America had quite an impact on religious social groups, specifically due to the fact that a new out-group surfaced – the secular state. Another alternative that will be explored separately is the creation of a global collective consciousness as promoted by Armstrong (2006). This alternative involves doing away with all out-groups and creating an all-inclusive universal in-group. The viability of this alternative will be explored in the relevant section but first the example of Christian fundamentalists and the secular state will be explored.

### **3.3.3.1 Religious Fundamentalists in the United States**

As will be illustrated in section 3.4 dealing with social competition, colonial America was characterised by competition mainly between different Christian denominations. Thus, the out-group was a religious group of a different denomination. But after the revolution and the establishment of an independent state, the United States of America, there suddenly was another out-group in the mix.

Even though a large majority of the population of colonial America was weary of mixing church and state, the gradual effects of secularism on religion were not welcomed by all religious groups. In the new independent state it was established that the church would

have no role in the affairs of the state. The Constitution of the United States would also have no mention of God (Harris, 2007:19).

According to Finke and Stark (1992:59) by the start of the revolution “the era of harsh religious persecution in the colonies had ended... Religious toleration prevailed in fact, if not yet in statute.” In the post-independence federal government “the state would be separated from all religious entanglements” (Finke et al, 1992:59). The United States of America was to be a secular state. In the aftermath of the establishment of this secular state it was noted that there was a gradual decline in religion - churches were losing numbers (Finke et al, 1992:56). Whether this decline was caused by secularism or by a host of other factors or events is not quite sure but some religious groups blamed secularism. These religious groups had identified a new out-group, namely the secular state. From then on, they would compare themselves to the secular state in order to establish their own superiority.

It was specifically during the twentieth century and the rise of Christian fundamentalism in the United States that the schisms between the ‘secular world’ and the ‘religious fundamentalist world’ became prominent. The secular world was purely driven by science and liberal values where the religious world was quite the opposite. Political issues arose where these two worlds were visibly in direct contrast with each other. The secular world promoted liberal values such as pro-abortion, anti-death penalty, equal rights to women, the teaching of evolution, a removal of prayer from schools, and also the promotion of gay rights. In contrast, the religious world were in favour of the death penalty, against abortion, lesser rights for women, the banning of evolution and replacing it with the teaching of creationism, compulsory prayer in schools, and finally, no rights for gays as. According to Armstrong (2004:ix) the fundamentalists were “adamantly opposed to many of the most positive values of modern society... democracy, pluralism, religious toleration, free speech, [and] the separation of church and state.”

It becomes clear that religious fundamentalists created an alternative to the secular or, as fundamentalists refer to it, “the fallen world” (Marty & Appleby, 1995:429). In the

words of Armstrong (2004:201): “Fundamentalists were beginning to retreat from mainstream society to create countercultures that reflected the way they thought things ought to be.” In order to strengthen this world they also established “alternative institutions” such as independent churches, clinics, schools, and radio stations to promote their version of the truth (Marty et al, 1995:451).

Although the initial approach of the religious fundamentalists was withdrawal from mainstream society, the late 1970s and 1980s brought forth a new approach. During this time the fundamentalists fought back by abandoning their initial passive approach and rather mobilising their members to engage in the politics of the secular world. They were attempting to ‘convert’ secular United States and establish religious United States as the dominant state model. To some extent they have achieved success in this regard. One should not forget that the U.S. is one of the most religious industrialised countries in the world. Armstrong (2004:315) explains: “[Religious fundamentalists] had learned how to conduct themselves in the political arena; they had enfranchised themselves, and, to an extent, resacralized American politics in a way that never ceases to amaze the more secular countries of Europe.”

To establish the superiority of the religious world, the religious fundamentalists would often ‘celebrate’ a blow to secular U.S as a victory for the religious U.S. For instance, the atrocious terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were explained by reverends Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, two prominent spokesmen of the religious fundamentalist world, as “divine judgment on a secular society that tolerates homosexuals and abortion” (Hitchens, 2007:32). According to the religious fundamentalists it is obvious that God carries the same contempt for the secular world as the religious fundamentalist world does. The attacks of September 11 confirmed, in some twisted way, the superiority of the religious fundamentalist world, for in God’s eyes, they were the preferred world.

The religious fundamentalists of the U.S. have become a force to be reckoned with. They have become a social group with widespread appeal that presents a genuine alternative to the secular world. They have created a world where abortion is banned and doctors who

are willing to perform such an act will be executed; a world where homosexuals are not welcome; a world where the woman knows her place, and where the husband is the head of the wife; a world where evolution is discarded and creationism reigns supreme; a world where schools allow prayer and Bible teaching; and finally, a world where there is no separation between church and state.

This section started out by arguing that an in-group will choose an out-group of lower status to compare themselves to. An out-group of lower status will allow a favourable comparison and the establishment of the superiority of the in-group whereas comparisons with high status groups will cause feelings of inferiority. This makes the example of Christian fundamentalists and secular U.S. a very interesting example. The reason for this is that most out-groups, especially the secular world, consider Christian fundamentalists as being backward and therefore a social group of lower status. On the other hand, most social groups, with the exception religious fundamentalists, consider the secular world as a very high status group that ranks high on the social hierarchy.

Thus, the question is how Christian fundamentalists can compare themselves with secular U.S. and not feel inferior as a social group? Armstrong (2004) provides the answer. She argues that these fundamentalists have rarely considered themselves inferior to any other social group because they created a world that is favoured by God. Even when they feel ostracised by mainstream society they still have “a sense of confidence and superiority” for they have “privileged information, denied to the secularists... [they] know what is really going on” (Armstrong, 2004:217). By applying this reasoning, Christian fundamentalists are able to compare themselves to social groups of higher status and at the same time retain their sense of superiority within the social hierarchy.

### **3.3.3.2 Creating a Global Collective Consciousness**

Another alternative is not to change the out-group but to do away with it completely by uniting all social groups into one universal in-group. In the words of Karen Armstrong (2006:398), we need to create a global collective consciousness. Pastor William Sloane Coffin, as quoted from Kimball (2008:212), is in agreement. He argues: “The challenge

today is to seek a unity that celebrates diversity... What is intolerable is for difference to become idolatrous... Human beings are fully human only... when they recognize that all people have more in common than they have in conflict” (Kimball, 2008:212).

Specifically within the religious context this option is supposed to be quite appealing. To narrow it down even more, in the Christian community such an option of a single universal in-group should carry great appeal for the Bible clearly asks of all Christians to love thy neighbour as thyself. Yet the Christian community remains divided. In-groups and out-groups have historically been created within denominations of the very same religion. It is based on this background that Allport (1954:447) argues: “People have failed to learn that the essence of religion is not self-justification, self-support, but rather humility, self-negotiation, and love of neighbour.”

It is however possible to argue that religious individuals have not failed to learn love of thy neighbor, they have simply chosen to apply this concept very exclusively. Since the concept of ‘thy neighbour’ was promoted it has been riddled with exclusivity. For instance, it has been argued by anthropologist John Hartung, as cited in Dawkins (2006:288), that in the context of the Bible, Jesus’ in-group was limited to Jews and when Jesus spoke of ‘thy neighbour’ he referred only to his fellow Jews (Dawkins, 2006:288). Unfortunately, this is what the concept of ‘thy neighbour’ has turned into. For Christians ‘thy neighbour’ often refers to only fellow Christians. In many cases it has become even more exclusive where ‘thy neighbour’ only refers to fellow Protestants or is even restricted to fellow Lutherans only.

In terms of importance, the concept of love for ‘thy neighbour’ can, through selective reading, be demoted to a position of lesser importance than other teachings of the Bible. This problem is often encountered in the religious fundamentalist community. According to Herriot (2007:93) a very clear feature of religious fundamentalism is selectivity. This refers to the selective reading fundamentalists engage in when reading the Bible. For instance, they can choose a topic such as homosexuality, which is not mentioned often in the Bible, and turn it into one of the focal points of their religion. In contrast, love for

‘thy neighbour’, which is a fairly common theme throughout the New Testament, can be demoted in terms of importance.

The issues of exclusivity and selective reading, specifically in the religious fundamentalist case, create massive problems for the creation of a global collective consciousness. But apart from these particular issues, there is also the issue of the basic human condition. As humans we struggle to extend our loyalties to a large, inclusive in-group. According to Allport (1954:43) the larger the circle of inclusion grows, the weaker the in-group grows. Brewer (1999:434) is in agreement, she explains: “In-group loyalty, and its concomitant depersonalized trust and cooperation, is most effectively engaged by relatively small, distinctive groups or social categories.” This implies that creating a global collective consciousness probably poses one of the greatest challenges as “world loyalty is the most difficult to achieve” (Allport, 1954:43). Allport (1954:43) is of opinion that “there seems to be special difficulty in fostering an in-group out of an entity as embracing as mankind.”

Although the creation of a global collective consciousness presents an inspiring ideal there are, what seems to be, many immovable stumbling blocks along the way. Thus, we need to arrive at the unfortunate conclusion that creating a global collective consciousness seems highly unlikely.

### **3.4 Social Competition**

The third option for dealing with invidious comparisons is social competition. The act of social competition is another option based on the value system of social change, meaning it is a group strategy to improve the status of the entire in-group. According to Horowitz (2000:143-144) the ultimate goal for any group member is to achieve a positive sense of self. To achieve this, groups compare with each other in order to ultimately achieve a positive group evaluation. This often results in an in-group engaging in direct competition with the out-group “on dimensions consensually valued by both groups” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:57-58). The competition can revolve around scarce resources of economic, political, or social nature, in order for the in-group to establish positive



distinctiveness from the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:44). Seul (1999:557) explains: “The process of intergroup competition produces a competitive dynamic in which groups attempt to enhance their identities relative to other groups.” To achieve a position of high status on the social hierarchy the in-group may try to “reverse the relative positions” of themselves and the out-group on a significant dimension (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:44). If the in-group is successful there will be a change in the social hierarchy. Competition has thus become a viable option for dealing with invidious comparisons as it allows a group to perhaps attain positive evaluation. Tajfel and Turner (1979:44) suggest that social groups “can only be evaluated comparatively” and thus competition becomes imminent. Tajfel and Turner (1979:44) are of the opinion that, due to its nature of focusing on the distribution of scarce resources, direct competition may result in conflict and antagonism between the relevant groups.

As many social groups have competed in the past, different religions or denominations of the same religion have often competed for scarce resources as well. In history this has involved competition for territory, political power, prominent religious positions, and of course, competition for the amount of converts or number of church members. Colonial America provides a good case study for religious competition, most notably competition for the establishment of an American bishop, but also competition for political power within the separate colonies. In colonial America the dominant faiths “benefited from superior economic and political resources” (Pyle & Davidson, 2003:63). A clear ranking of religious groups emerged during the eighteenth century. Firmly established at the top of the social hierarchy were those who had access to economic and political resources (Pyle et al, 2003:65). In effect, competition for political power was also competition for a higher ranking in the social hierarchy of colonial America. These examples will be discussed in the following sections.

#### **3.4.1 Congregationalists vs. Anglicans: A Bishop for Colonial America**

Massachusetts provides an example of the role of religious competition for the establishment of a bishop in America in the eighteenth century. In the first stages of settlement in this colony only orthodox Congregationalists were allowed the privilege to

vote or take up a position in office. Settlers who did not conform to the Orthodox Church were sent out of the colony. In effect, Congregationalism became the established religion not only in Massachusetts, but in the whole of New England – with the exception of Rhode Island. But by the eighteenth century the Anglican Church was making prominent advances in Massachusetts and seemed to threaten Congregationalist control (Pyle et al, 2003:62). Up to that time the Anglicans were “considered a dissenting religion” in most of the New England colonies (Bonomi, 1986:54). In Massachusetts specifically, Anglicans were “initially banned from the settlement and denied citizenship rights and religious freedoms” (Pyle et al, 2004:62). But now, with the sudden growth of Anglicanism within the colony English officials were pressuring colonial officials to favour the Church of England – an Anglican institution. It was already in this early stage that competition between the Congregationalists and Anglicans became evident.

It was during this time that the idea to establish an Anglican bishop in America took form. Of course the Congregationalists, and also other denominations in colonial America, were firmly against such an establishment. The issue was not simply the establishment of a bishop in America, but the possible power such a bishop might exert over Americans of all religions. It was feared that the establishment of a bishop will drastically strengthen the Anglican community to such an extent that they could challenge the superiority of the religious social groups ranked above them in the social hierarchy. A Presbyterian leader was quoted saying: “What we dread is their (Anglicans) political power and their courts” (Bonomi, 1986:200). What was feared was the possibility of a combined state and church in America as it was widely believed that “bishops endangered civil as well as religious liberties” (Bonomi, 1986:200).

In order to strengthen the position of the Church of England in New England the church appointed ministers in area where Congregationalist clergy already served. The Anglican Church in New England also used their financial capabilities “to lure Congregationalist ministers to the Anglican community through the promise of a better salary” (Pyle et al, 2003:62). The Congregationalists responded by making it their mission to establish new Congregationalist churches all over New England in order to “head off Anglican

advances” (Pyle et al, 2003:62). Competition for adherents intensified between the denominations to the point where these churches placed a renewed emphasis on church doctrine (Bonomi, 1986:40).

To counter the threat of the establishment of an American bishop Congregationalists started to work together with Presbyterians in the middle colonies as both these denominations feared a loss of civil and religious liberties with the establishment of a bishop. The Congregationalists of America also formed close ties with the Congregationalists of England. This alliance played a very important role in continually defeating the efforts of the Anglicans to send a bishop to America (Pyle et al, 2003:62).

In the meantime the Church of England employed several strategies to improve the numbers and influence of Anglicans in America. England sent over office holders who had a “notably Anglican orientation” in an attempt to make the colonies “as much like the mother country as possible” (Bonomi, 1986:200). The appointment of Anglicans to provincial councils and judicial offices were becoming noticeable (Bonomi, 1986:201). Leading Anglicans wanted to Anglicize their governments by bringing it under the royal charters and in effect strengthen the Church of England. This course of action was most notable in the colonies of Rhode Island and Connecticut. But these attempts were strongly fought by those who feared “that the Church of England might thereby gain preferential status” (Bonomi, 1986:201).

Another strategy employed by the Church of England to improve their position in America was to encourage the immigration of Anglican clergymen to America. This encouragement took the form of “university fellowships with seven-year colonial service clauses, government subsidies for transportation, and a form of clerical ‘impressment’ that sent ministers abroad for five-year stints” (Bonomi, 1986:31). The clergymen that eventually came to America were confronted by competing denominations and, above all, the absence of any bishop “to ordain and discipline ministers for the Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed Churches” (Bonomi, 1986:40).

Specifically in New England tensions between the Anglicans - backed by the Church of England - and the Congregationalists were reaching new heights. The establishment of a bishop in America was fought vigorously by the Congregationalists of New England, more specifically, those of Massachusetts. The situation is summed up well by the historian of King's Chapel:

“The standing grievance between the two parties was in the fact that each really claimed supremacy of the same kind. Congregationalism was practically the established Church of Massachusetts... Face to face with this institution, to which the great majority of the people still belonged... now stood a few members of the powerful establishment of the mother country” (Osgood, 1958:118).

In the end the Congregationalists, along with their supporters in England and their Presbyterian allies in the middle colonies, were able to head off the advances of the Anglicans in America and the Church of England. At the same time the Congregationalists were able to establish their superiority as a social group through direct social competition.

### **3.4.2 Virginia: Competing for Political Power**

Apart from the competition between Congregationalists and Anglicans for the establishment of a bishop in America, there were also other states in which competition of a religious nature took form. In eighteenth century Virginia competition for political power had strong religious undertones.

In Virginia Anglicanism became the established religion early on in the settlement stages. As in many other American colonies, gaining an upper hand religiously often translated into gaining an upper hand politically. The Anglicans were, however, reluctant to extend any political freedoms “to those outside the Anglican communion” (Pyle et al, 2003:61). They heartily protected “the hegemony of [their] ecclesiastical establishment” by actively suppressing any dissenters (Pyle et al, 2003:61).

But the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century had a tremendous affect on the lower classes of Virginia. The result was the rapid growth of Presbyterian and Baptist congregations. The Anglicans suddenly feared that they would be successfully challenged by these growing congregations not only as the established religion of the colony, but also as the holders of political power. These Baptists and Presbyterians were heartily trying to convert as many people as possible to their congregation in order to challenge the power of the Anglicans. In the process they managed to convert some vestrymen. The Anglican response was to dissolve several vestries “for including non-Anglican vestrymen” (Pyle et al, 2003:61).

After the 1760s, the relationship between Baptists and Anglicans were incredibly tensed (Pyle et al, 2003:61). But the Baptists and Presbyterians never managed to successfully challenge the power of the Anglicans, thus the Anglicans remained in full control of Virginia and were able to use their political power to thwart any effort by the Baptists and Presbyterians to obtain power (Pyle et al, 2003:61). A similar scenario could be found in Pennsylvania where the politically powerful Quakers were challenged by the Anglican minority present within this colony (Pyle et al, 2003:62).

In the cases of Virginia and Pennsylvania the dominant faiths of the colonies benefited from superior economic and political resources in order to prevent their competitors from making advances in the social hierarchy and at the same time establish their own superiority as a social group.

### **3.5 Reactionary Violence**

The fourth option for dealing with invidious comparisons is reactionary violence. This option is pursued within the belief system of social change. A group that constantly finds themselves at the losing end when comparisons are being made will often make use of violence to fight their position of inferiority. This type of violence is reactionary and usually a last resort for dealing with invidious comparisons. According to Horowitz (2000:166) evidence shows that “backward groups are more frequent initiators” of violence while advanced groups are more frequently the intended targets of this violence.

The concepts of backward and advanced groups were first introduced by Horowitz. He explains that to be a backward group the group needs to feel weak in relation to advanced groups. Comparisons with other groups are not a viable option for the group's inferior position is imminent and further comparison would just reinforce their feeling of backwardness and their position of inferiority. Horowitz (2000:167) explains: "Backward groups in general feel at a competitive disadvantage as they compare their imputed personal qualities with those imputed to advanced groups."

Belonging to an inferior group results in a lack of self-esteem for group members. According to Horowitz (2000:179) "a correlation has been found between lack of individual self-esteem and degree of hostility toward out-groups [and] aggression... [becomes] a means by which to gain a sense of worth." To the backward group survival is of key concern. This fear of extinction also provides a ready "rationale for hostility" (Horowitz, 2000:175, 180).

In 1998 Madeleine Albright, then U.S. Secretary of State, listed thirty of the world's most dangerous groups. Over half of these groups were religious (Juergensmeyer, 2001:6). This list illustrated that religious groups – predominantly fundamentalist – increasingly used violence to 'communicate' with the secular world. Reactionary violence based on religious convictions has become a great threat to modern society and a deeper analysis of this phenomenon is necessary at this stage.

Authors such as Horowitz (2000), Fisher (1999) and Castells (2004) are in agreement that religious fundamentalists are reactionary by nature. Mostly they are reactive against "aspects of modern life" (Fisher, 1999:21). According to Horowitz (2000:166) "the sense of backwardness is a profoundly unsettling group feeling." It is a feeling that has the tendency to inspire reactionary violence which "clearly reflect[s] felt differences in acculturation to modern ways" (Horowitz, 2000:168). Kimball (2008:200) is of opinion that "fear, insecurity, and the desire to protect" often inspires or enables a group to dehumanise the out-group and even to wage war against the out-group. Juergensmeyer, as quoted from McTernan (2003:35), argues that "these movements are not simply

aberrations but religious responses to social situations and expressions of deeply held convictions.”

It has been mentioned in a previous section that fundamentalists aim to protect their religious identity from modernity. It is exactly when the fundamentalists fail to successfully achieve this that they turn to violence to find a solution. Fox and Shmuel (2004:85) argue that “fundamentalist militancy begins as a reaction to the penetration of their community by secular or religious outsiders.” Fundamentalists are of opinion that modernisation “has undermined traditional lifestyles, community values, and morals, which are based in part on religion” (Fox & Shmuel, 2004:112). Religious fundamentalists question the legitimacy of the secular world. A common complaint is that the secular world has excluded God and, as a result, has become valueless. Therefore, the goal of religious fundamentalists “is to make religion the foundation of a new social order” based on the belief that “society should conform to the commands and values of their sacred foundational texts” (McTernan, 2003:27).

Horowitz (2000:181) is of the opinion that “people often express hostility toward those who create uncertainty about the correctness of their own behavior and that of the groups to which they belong.” A violent reaction to secular modernity is usually bred by feelings of humiliation due to being viewed by ‘the other’ as inferior. According to Stern (2003:282) a way to rid oneself of this inferior identity is to assume the role of martyr “on behalf of a purported spiritual cause.” The tables are turned and suddenly the weak becomes the strong, the one previously considered to be inferior now has destructive powers over the secular world (Stern, 2003:282). In this case aggression becomes ego-syntonic for the group or individual. It becomes “a means by which to gain a sense of worth” (Horowitz, 2000:179).

According to Austin and Worchel (1979) violence “often represents the only channel available for [some group] to express itself, to be heard, and to obtain recognition and visibility.” Therefore, Juergensmeyer, as quoted from McTernan (2003:35), is of the opinion that “religion provides [the religious fundamentalist] with a sense of honour,

personal pride, kinship and identity. Violence gives them a sense of empowerment. The combination of religion and violence provides the antidotes to humiliation.” By empowering themselves through the use of violence, religious fundamentalists can rid themselves of the humiliation of constantly being viewed as a backward group.

The resort to violence is often viewed by the fundamentalists as the only way to effectively communicate their message to the secular world and establish their presence as a force to be reckoned with. Through this they also ensure the continued survival of their group because “a group that cannot compete will be overcome or will die out” (Horowitz, 2000:178). Most importantly, they are not interested to negotiate with their enemy, the secular world – otherwise considered by them as the evil forces. The fundamentalist view corresponds very much to the words of Windass (1964:102): “You cannot negotiate with a total enemy, any more than you can make a truce with the devil. Only destruction and defeat make sense.” Their view is based on a demand for unconditional surrender and a complete rejection of a negotiated peace (Windass, 1964:101). According to McTernan (2003:42) “the unwillingness to compromise stems from the belief that they have a total and exclusive monopoly on truth and goodness.”

The conflict between religious fundamentalists and the secular state is framed in terms of good versus evil, between truth and falsehood, and between the children of God and offspring of Satan (Selengut, 2003:18). This is a characteristic of a Holy war. Believers do not choose between violence and nonviolence “but are drafted into God’s infantry to fight the Lord’s battles and proclaim his message to the world” (Selengut, 2003:18). Although this may sound irrational to the secular mind, to believers Holy wars are “acts of faith which are eminently reasonable and rest on a coherent principled theological rationale” (Selengut, 2003:19). Holy wars only have religious goals and are waged to bring about “an improved human order” (Selengut, 2003:19). Stern (2003:281) came to the conclusion that most religious fundamentalist groups who engage in violent acts to cleanse the world of evil believe, or at least started out believing, “that they are creating a more perfect world. From their perspective, they are purifying the world of injustice, cruelty, and all that is antihuman.” Within Holy wars the Golden Rule of ‘love thy



neighbor as thyself' or the commandment 'thou shalt not murder' is not applicable for Holy wars are not about murder but rather about "situational moments of divine – human cooperation in furtherance of God's plan for justice and human redemption"(Selengut, 2003:21).

There are two reasons why Christian fundamentalists will engage in acts related to Holy war. The first reason is to protect or defend their religion against the enemy. The enemy is seen as anyone who threatens their spiritual well-being. By tolerating cultural expressions like pornography, the sale of alcohol, and also other practices that are seen as a danger to Christian moral values, the secular government has been identified as the main enemy of the Christian fundamentalist. The second reason to engage in acts related to Holy war is to punish deviance. Those who challenge religious orthodoxy should be punished. This explains the attacks on abortion clinics and doctors who are willing to perform abortions. According to the Christian fundamentalist these individuals need to be taught a lesson (Selengut, 2003:22).

Gray (2008:204) argues that "revolutionaries have time and again come to accept violence as an instrument for cleansing the world of evil." It is probably due to a similar conclusion drawn by Herbert Lockyear that he claimed there could be no world peace because "the Bible contradicts such a utopian dream" (Armstrong, 2004:217).

According to Selengut (2003:224) "the bulk of cases involving religious violence are motivated by religious doctrine, faith, and sacred fury." McTernan (2003:22) explains that religiously motivated acts of violence are based on a religious belief that the "scriptural or foundational texts were dictated verbatim by a divine authority and as such are beyond interpretation. The word as it is written must be obeyed." Religious fundamentalists are convinced that their scriptures and traditions are the absolute and single truth, and those who oppose their beliefs or way of life are at fault. This is made problematic when one includes the fact that those fundamentalists consider themselves to be willing soldiers for God, they are forced to fight those who are "violating God's directives to humanity" (Selengut, 2003:2). In essence religious fundamentalists act on

“deeply held religious convictions” and a belief that they are carrying out some sacred duty to give glory to God (McTernan, 2003:22). According to Juergensmeyer (2001:218) religious justifications for violence have enabled religious activists “to go about their business of killing with the certainty that they were following the logic of God.”

### **3.5.1 Christian Fundamentalism in the United States**

Although considered one of the most developed countries of the First World the United States has not been exempted from “violent episodes associated with American religious extremists” such as the Christian Identity movement, the Christian militia, and Christian anti-abortion activists (Juergensmeyer, 2001:3-4). Increasingly the U.S. has been forced to confront religious violence stemming from their own citizens and aimed at their national government and its secular policies (Juergensmeyer, 2001:4). In the last few decades the U.S. was confronted by the bombings of abortion clinics, gay bars, and federal buildings and also with the brutal killings of doctors and staff who were willing to perform abortions (Juergensmeyer, 2001:23,31). Selengut (2003:167) argues that “violence has been a part of the Christian traditionalist response to secular modernity.” In the following paragraphs it will be illustrated in which way violence has formed part of the Christian fundamentalist’s response to secular modernity.

Traditional Christian groups in the U.S. are in many ways familiar and quite at home with modernity. Selengut (2003:167) explains: “The rational and bureaucratic organization of the workplace, the intricacies of secular politics and international affairs, and the limited role of religion in the public sphere are familiar and understandable to these faithful Christians.” Yet they remain hostile to secular modernity. The mere fact that these Christians are confronted with modernity and the workings of a secular government has angered them greatly. First of all they are angry that the Bible is not respected as the word of God but rather treated as literature; second, because their Christian morals have been largely rejected in favour of modernism; and third, because homosexuals are accepted and that evolution is taught in schools. There has been an overall disregard of their teachings within the secular world and this has angered them to a point where some individuals have shown their disgust through acts of religious violence. They are fighting

back by attempting to “[turn] society back to God and Christian morality and values” (Selengut, 2003:166).

Within the U.S. there is a host of religious extremist groups who believe “that only the destruction of the modern democratic state and its culture will liberate Christian America from the Satanic powers of the degenerate morality and values of modern Western Civilization” (Selengut, 2003:167). The Aryan Nation movement, the White Patriots Party, the White American Bastion, and the Silent Brotherhood are all connected to the Christian Identity movement. These groups actively pursue violence as a fitting response to secular modernity (Selengut, 2003:167).

The Christian opponents to abortion have been a very active force within the U.S. over the last few decades. The bombings of abortion clinics and the murders of abortion providers have been well documented. These acts are considered to be “a religious obligation for faithful Christians” (Selengut, 2003:36). These Christian fundamentalists are urged “to do all they can to destroy secular American society and set up the Bible as the law of the land” (Selengut, 2003:36).

Mike Bray, convicted for the bombings of abortion clinics, claimed that he was motivated to bring down the secular government as “he saw American society in a state of utter depravity, over which its elected officials presided with an almost satanic disregard for truth and human life” (Juergensmeyer, 2001:23). Bray also stated that “Christianity gives him the right to defend innocent unborn children even by use of force” (Juergensmeyer, 2001:23). Bray provides a fitting example of the mind of a Christian fundamentalist. First he identified his secular government as an evil force – relating its behaviour to that of Satan - and then he reacted with violence against the secular ‘other’ and justified his actions in the name of Christianity.

As a last thought on the issue it should be mentioned that many of these Christian fundamentalists are also postmillennialists. They believe “that a Christian Kingdom must be established on earth before Christ’s return” (Juergensmeyer, 2001:28). This belief

almost necessitates violence in order to establish the Bible as the law of the land and these instances of violence will not stop until the Christian Kingdom has been established. A study conducted by the Institute for the Study of American Religion (ISAR) and Center for Studies on New Religion (CESNUR) concluded, fitting to the previous point made, that “even though incidents of violence may be rare... future episodes will continue to occur” (McTernan, 2003:40).

### **3.6 Complete Withdrawal: A Possible Fifth Option**

In sections 3.2 to 3.5 the options for dealing with invidious comparisons as outlined by Tajfel and Turner (1979) were discussed. It was established that individual mobility involved the dissociation of the individual from the in-group where the in-group failed to provide a positive sense of self. The example of religious affiliation in the United States was provided to illustrate this strategy. The second option, social creativity, is best described as a strategy where the elements of the comparative situation are altered. This includes the creation of a new dimension of comparison where the example of the relationship between Protestants and Catholics were discussed within the setting of the Thirty Years’ War and the impact of the Peace of Westphalia. Second, social creativity includes the sub-option to change the rankings. Here the in-group can reverse the established value system to convert previous negative connotations into positive ones. Third, social creativity includes the sub-option to change the out-group. The examples of religious fundamentalists and secularism in the U.S., as well as the creation of a global collective consciousness, were provided. The third option discussed for dealing with invidious comparisons was social competition. This option involves direct competition with the out-group in order to attain higher status. The example of Colonial America was used to discuss competition between Christian denominations for the establishment of a bishop and also for political power. The fourth and last option discussed was the option of reactionary violence. Here the role of backward groups was discussed in the initiation of violence against the out-group as a last resort to attain higher status in the social hierarchy. Many religious fundamentalist groups have made use of this option to establish themselves within the social hierarchy.

The four options discussed in this chapter and again outlined in the above paragraph, have been presented as the only options to deal with invidious comparisons. But after careful reconsideration and taking into account the religious groups encountered during research, it was noted that these options failed to explain the behaviour of one particular religious group, the Amish. A brief description of this religious group and their views are necessary at this stage.

According to Hood et al. (2005:134) “the Amish believe that theirs is a unique and redemptive community called to be separate from the world.” The Amish, as a religious social group, refrains from “propagating the gospel by insisting that others conform to their beliefs or practices” (Hood et al, 2005:134). They are aware of their “differences from dominant culture” but these differences are understood by the Amish “to be indicators of a far deeper and more meaningful religious structure” (Hood et al, 2005:134). This religious group rather finds salvation in complete withdrawal from larger society. They withdraw not as individuals, but as an entire social group.

In terms of the options to deal with invidious comparisons as provided in sections 3.2 to 3.5, it becomes clear that the behaviour of the Amish does not quite fit into this framework. Firstly, the strategy of individual mobility can be eliminated because the Amish withdraw from society as an entire social group. Thus, their withdrawal is a group strategy. The option of social creativity with its subsections also does not explain the behaviour of the Amish. As already mentioned, the option of social creativity involves “altering the elements of the comparative situation” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:43). The Amish do not compare themselves with any other social group. They have completely separated themselves from mainstream society and lead their lives in seclusion. The fact that the Amish do not compare themselves with other social groups also implies that they do not compete with other social groups. Thus, the option of social competition also does not describe their behaviour. Finally, the fourth option, violence as a reaction, also does not describe the behaviour of the Amish. This group has never reacted violently to the secular world or any other social group within this world. The Amish have not even reacted in a non-violent way to any other social group. They are “nonconfrontational

[pacifists...] their purpose and their meaning... is not to transform culture, but rather to withdraw from it” (Hood et al, 2005:153). The only request they make to dominant society is to be “allowed to continue their ways without interference” (Hood et al, 2005:153).

It becomes clear that none of the options discussed fit the option chosen by the Amish to deal with invidious comparisons. Their behaviour should be explained by an option that involves the withdrawal of an entire social group in order to completely separate themselves from mainstream society. Although examples for such an option are quite rare outside the Amish case, it is still existent and should be accounted for. Therefore it is proposed that a fifth option be added, the option of complete withdrawal as a group strategy. This option would specifically involve the complete withdrawal from mainstream society by an entire social group who has no interest in interacting with other social groups. Meaning, this social group would refrain from comparing themselves to or competing with other social groups. This social group would also refrain from reacting to other social groups in a violent way. Like the Amish, a social group that makes use of this proposed option should successfully form their own world separate from the world in which other social groups are forced to function.

In the following chapter the options for dealing with invidious comparisons will be evaluated according to the viability of each option, specifically with regards to religious fundamentalist groups. Religious fundamentalists are forced to function in a secular world which considers them to be backward and inferior. Therefore the concluding chapter will investigate, according to the religious fundamentalist, which option would be best to pursue in order to establish their in-group as a superior group, a group ranked high on the social hierarchy. In other words, which option would ensure the survival, or even the blossoming, of the religious fundamentalist in-group? This topic will be discussed in an attempt to shed some light on, what some academics have called, ‘a hard-to-understand phenomenon,’ the phenomenon of violent religious fundamentalism.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **4.1 Social Identity and Religion**

In the introduction of this study it was mentioned that we often encounter others “whose identity and nature are not clear to us” (Jenkins, 1996:9). Religious fundamentalists have certainly, up to this time, fallen within this category. Berger (1999:2) is probably not alone in his understanding of religious fundamentalism when he proclaims it to be a “strange, hard-to-understand phenomena.”

This study started by introducing the intratextual model, as developed by Hood et al. (2005), to explain the all important role of religious texts within religious fundamentalist movements. First of all, in order to truly comprehend this model and its imminent impact on fundamentalist behaviour and thought, we need to accept, even if just for this particular moment, that the religious fundamentalists are correct to believe that their sacred text contain the single and ultimate truth. Of course, we also need to take into account that this model is applicable to all religious fundamentalist groups and therefore the Bible, Quran, Torah, and a number of other sacred texts, all have the exact same impact on their specific fundamentalist followers.

Hood et al. (2005:22-23) explained that “a dialogic encounter emerges between the reader and the text in which the revelation of the Divine Being becomes illuminated in the form of absolute truths.” Of course, to the outsider it is clear that there exists a multitude of sacred texts and therefore there exists a multitude of absolute truths. However, to the religious fundamentalist there is no question that only his truth, provided by his sacred text, is the only truth, the single truth. According to Herriot (2007:55) “the inerrancy of scripture is one of the basic and non-negotiable beliefs which are the foundation of fundamentalist doctrine.” Those who do not recognise this sacred text as

the single source of authority are considered a threat to the fundamentalist worldview and are treated as outsiders or even as outright enemies. It is these sacred texts, treated as absolute truths, that provide a platform for intolerance of the 'other' and his/her views and beliefs. Based on this intratextual model it becomes quite clear why Tetreault and Denmark (2004:273) argue that "religious social movements create powerful in-group solidarity and vicious out-group characterization."

Social identity theory has been thoroughly explained in the second chapter and therefore it will not be repeated here. However, it is necessary to highlight a few key aspects of the theory before continuing. It is important to remember that social groups do not stand in isolation. They are formed in contrast to other social groups. Thus, the existence of one social group implies the existence of a contrasting group. Group members strive to attain a positive sense of self. Because the individual group member is such an integrated part of the group the individual's self-concept will be based on the evaluation of the group as a whole. The evaluation of the group is determined through comparisons with other groups. Positive outcomes of group comparisons will result in high status for the group and enhanced self-esteem for its members while a negative outcome will result in low status for the group and low self-esteem for the group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:40).

With the social identity in mind, it was necessary to give attention to an important question posed by Kimball (2008:100): How can each social group function best "in a world in which most others don't share the same understanding?" The third chapter addressed this issue by outlining the options for dealing with invidious comparisons. Examples for these options were exclusively drawn from Christian experiences both in the past and present. Since this thesis ultimately wants to effectively address the hard-to-understand phenomenon that is religious fundamentalism, these options will now be evaluated according to their viability for religious fundamentalists and their striving for survival. According to Armstrong (2004:362) "fundamentalism is not going to disappear." Therefore it is of the utmost importance that this 'hard-to-explain phenomenon' is clarified in an almost simplistic fashion that rests on the basis of social



identity theory. This will allow for the comprehension of religious fundamentalists as social groupings and will explain their behaviour accordingly. So the question now becomes: How can religious fundamentalist groups function best in a world where most other social groups do not share the same understanding? Before this question is addressed it is necessary to remind the reader of some of the main features of religious fundamentalism.

In the second chapter the main features of religious fundamentalists, as provided by Herriot (2007), were outlined. First, fundamentalist movements form in reaction to modernism; second, they view the world in binary terms, either good or evil, for or against them; third, they respect their sacred text as the only authoritative text and blindly obey it; fourth, they read their sacred text selectively to establish which parts take precedence over others; and fifth, they believe in the end God will establish his kingdom on earth. It was also established in the second chapter that religious fundamentalists are more intolerant than their non-fundamentalist counterparts. Apart from verbally rejecting the 'other', religious fundamentalist groups are more likely to segregate themselves from other social groups as is the case with the Amish, and are also more likely to participate in the highest degree of intolerance, namely physical attack. Numerous abortion clinic bombings in the United States, the Oklahoma City bombing 1995, and the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 come to mind.

Although the focus of this study fell exclusively on Christianity and Christian fundamentalism it is possible to make certain generalisations that apply to all religious fundamentalist groups within the monotheistic framework. All of these fundamentalists – Christian, Jewish, or Muslim – believe to be in possession of the single truth. Therefore, as Hood et al. (2008) argued when explaining the intratextual model, it is not an issue revolving so much around the content of fundamentalist beliefs but rather an issue of how they believe. It is here that the common denominator is to be found. All of them believe in a single absolute truth and all of them believe to be correct. Of course the main features of religious fundamentalists, as discussed in the previous paragraph, also apply to all monotheistic fundamentalist groups. Therefore, when discussing the options for

dealing with invidious comparisons and its viability for religious fundamentalist groups, a generalisation could be made to include all religious fundamentalist groups within the monotheistic framework and not just Christian fundamentalism (the focus of the study so far). All these religious fundamentalist groups are pursuing the same ends only within a different belief structure.

## **4.2 Evaluating the Options**

The inerrancy of their holy scripture is of the utmost importance to the religious fundamentalist and their beliefs and actions are based on the contents of their scripture. To deviate from it is to betray your God and also your fellow group members. Religious fundamentalism literally requires conformity of biblical proportions. It is also important to remind the reader that religious fundamentalists are viewed as backwards by many social groups. Yet these fundamentalists are forced to function in a predominantly secular world. It is for these reasons that only a few of the options discussed in the third chapter present viable alternatives for religious fundamentalist groups to pursue.

### **4.2.1 Individual Mobility**

The case made for individual mobility becomes problematic when applied to religious fundamentalists. These fundamentalists simply know that they are right “because they have read the truth in a holy book and they know, in advance, that nothing will budge them from their belief” (Dawkins, 2006:319). According to Dawkins (2006:319) the holy book is “an axiom and not a process of reasoning.” But then again, religious fundamentalists are not renowned for their reasoning skills. The truth of their holy book is not likely to be brought into questioning and any evidence that contradicts it will mostly likely result in the evidence being discarded, not the holy book (Dawkins, 2006:319).

Harris (2008:150) admits that “it is no straightforward task to engage such people [fundamentalists] in constructive dialogue, to convince them of our common interests... and to mutually celebrate the diversity of our cultures.” If we want to establish peaceful means and ends, society and religious individuals, especially religious fundamentalists,

“must undergo a radical transformation” (Harris, 2006:151). It should be so radical, it will require religious fundamentalists to let go of the most important and most defining aspect of their being.

It is possible for some fundamentalists to “experience a conversion into a different worldview” (Herriot, 2007:120). Through secular science it is possible to create uncertainties in moderate religious circles but less likely so within the religious fundamentalist camp. The reason for this is that religious fundamentalists can simply disregard any argument that may bring about uncertainties within their belief system as they can explain it away by simply referring to one or more of their basic assumptions – such as the inerrancy of the Bible (Herriot, 2007:120). It can also be argued that for some reason the advances made in secular science, arguments formed that have the ability to evoke uncertainty about religious fundamentalist beliefs, have only strengthened the belief of religious fundamentalists. For the reasons provided, it can be argued that individual mobility is not a strategy likely to be pursued by religious fundamentalists.

#### **4.2.2 Social Creativity**

Under the second option, namely social creativity, three sub-options were discussed. These were (a) creating a new dimension of comparison, (b) changing the rankings, and (c) changing the out-group. These three sub-options will be evaluated in this section.

##### **4.2.2.1 New Dimension of Comparison**

As has already been mentioned, examples of any social group, much less religious social groups, which have pursued this strategy in the past to improve their status are hard to find. The main problem encountered with this strategy is the act of legitimising the new dimension of comparison, not only in the eyes of the in-group, but specifically for the out-group. If there is any chance that the new dimension of comparison will threaten the superior status of the out-group, the out-group will simply not agree to the new dimension of comparison, they will reject it. The religious fundamentalists face the very same problem. They can try to change the most salient dimension of comparison in order

to improve their comparative status but their new dimension of comparison is likely to be rejected by those groups that rank higher on the social hierarchy. Therefore, it is argued that changing the dimension of comparison is not a viable strategy to pursue in order to improve the ranking and status of religious fundamentalist groups.

#### **4.2.2.2 Changing the Rankings**

Two strategies were initially discussed under this heading. One, the religious social group can modernise in order to improve their status as promoted by Armstrong (2006) and Kimball (2008), or two, the group can change the negative connotation previously made to a salient aspect of their identity into a positive connotation. The example of ‘Black is Beautiful’ was mentioned by Tajfel and Turner (1979) in the context of the civil rights movement in 1960s America.

In the religious fundamentalist case modernisation is simply out of the question. Within the more moderate ranks of the religious realm this strategy may be completely viable but, in the fundamentalist case, it is important to take into account the fact that the fundamentalist identity is firmly rooted in a deliberate failure to modernise. It was, and is, specifically widespread modernisation that has caused these groups to grab hold of the fundamentals of their religion in order to protect and preserve it, to guard it against the influences of secularism. To modernise would, in effect, mean to cease to be a fundamentalist, to completely let go of an enormous part of the social identity. Thus, modernisation is not a viable avenue for religious fundamentalist groups to pursue.

In terms of changing the rankings, Elizondo (1985) provides the answer for religious fundamentalists. He provides a number of ways for the religious fundamentalist to give aspects with previously negative connotation positive characteristics. First, Elizondo (1985:47) introduces the Gospel Matrix which proclaims that in the end all people “must be judged by the words of the gospels.” This already provides the fundamentalist with the upper-hand as the inerrancy of the scripture is of key importance and is accepted as the absolute truth and the ultimate authoritative text (refer back to the intratextual model in section 1.3). According to the fundamentalists, the Gospel Matrix places them in a

superior position to those individuals and social groups that do not strictly adhere to their holy scripture. Second, Elizondo (1985:53) argues: “What the world rejects, God chooses as his very own.” Again, this statement places the religious fundamentalist in a superior position, for they are the rejected of this world, they are the ones considered to be backwards by many other social groups – specifically the secular world. But now the religious fundamentalist is told that God invites “especially those who have been rejected” into his kingdom. According to Elizondo’s measurements, religious fundamentalists are now starting to move up the social hierarchy with some pace. And now Elizondo (1985) deals the final blow. According to God “the simple people will be the first ones to understand the love and wisdom of the father; the wise and intelligent of ‘this world’ will be excluded” (Elizondo, 1985:56). Religious fundamentalists understand the greatness of God while the secular world, based on science and liberal values, lacks this understanding. Therefore, in terms of eternal rewards, the religious fundamentalist is sure to gain access to heaven while those who fail to understand the love and wisdom of God will be excluded and instead be condemned to burn in hell for all eternity.

Through Elizondo’s (1985) arguments the religious fundamentalists are able to turn the existing social hierarchy on its head. They can now live and measure themselves according to God’s social hierarchy, where they assume top position, while rejecting the social hierarchy based on earthly, secular standards. Through this argumentation the religious fundamentalists are able to reject any negative connotations and turn it into positive characteristics. This proves to be a viable option to pursue in order to improve group ranking and self-esteem. However, one obvious problem should be addressed. Although the religious fundamentalists now live according to the hierarchy of God and claim to be superior, other social groups still live according to the earthly social hierarchy mainly based on secular standards and still consider the fundamentalists to be inferior. The religious fundamentalists have only improved their social standing in the hierarchy of God but have still failed to improve their standing in the secular world. Still, this strategy succeeds in improving self-esteem and should be considered successful if only for this reason.

#### **4.2.2.3 Changing the Out-Group**

The creation of a global collective consciousness, as promoted by Armstrong (2006), has been discussed in a previous section as a strategy to change the out-group, but due to this strategy's absolute inclusive nature it will be immediately disregarded as a strategy likely to be pursued by religious fundamentalist groups.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that in some cases where the in-group compares unfavourably with the out-group of comparison, the in-group can change their out-group to a lower status group which will allow for favourable comparisons. Religious fundamentalists have positioned themselves firmly as an alternative to the secular world and therefore compare themselves on various levels with the secular world. One reason to question the viability of this option with regards to religious fundamentalists is that choosing the dominant secular world as the primary out-group may be slightly too ambitious for a group that is considered to be backwards. Religious fundamentalists are probably better off to change their out-group to a different religious fundamentalist group, or even moderate religious groups, in order to establish a sense of superiority. But of course, such an observation belongs solely to a non-fundamentalist outsider.

As it has been argued in section 3.3.3.1, the religious fundamentalists do not consider themselves to be inferior to the secular world or any other social group and thus, choosing the secular world as the primary out-group is not an option that is 'too ambitious'. According to religious fundamentalists they are superior because they are favoured by God. They are able to retain a unique sense of superiority while comparing themselves to 'so-called' higher status groups. Thus, it does not matter who the out-group is and a change in out-group certainly will not affect the position of the religious fundamentalist group on the social hierarchy. But again, as is the case with changing the rankings, with this type of reasoning the religious fundamentalists have only improved their sense of self but have failed to improve the overall standing of their group on the social hierarchy based on secular standards. Thus, this strategy is not likely to be pursued in order to improve the social ranking of the entire group.

#### **4.2.3 Social Competition**

It could be argued that religious fundamentalists compete with the secular world to establish their values and beliefs as the dominant values and beliefs. But religious fundamentalists are, in essence, considered to be ‘backwards’. In contrast, the secular world is an ‘advanced’ social group. Competition between these two groups is likely to confirm the superiority of the secular world and the backwardness of the religious fundamentalists. In section 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 it was illustrated how dominant social groups, in these cases Congregationalists in Massachusetts and Anglicans in Virginia, used their position of dominance in the social hierarchy to suppress other social groups who challenged their dominant position. In both cases success was guaranteed due to the dominant group’s control of resources which could be effectively employed to head off the advances made by the out-group. Today the secular world is able to effectively use their control of resources to head off the advances made by other social groups who present an alternative to the current secular model.

However, Christian fundamentalists in the U.S. have not been fazed by their social standing in comparison to the secular world and actively engage in social competition with their secular government. Quite surprisingly, in some respects the Christian fundamentalists have been successful. By establishing radio stations and television networks, Christian fundamentalists in the U.S. have successfully made use of the media as a medium to promote their alternative to the secular world. They have also established alternative institutions such as independent churches and schools. Thus, it is possible for the religious fundamentalists to compete with the secular world in terms of spreading their message and reaching large numbers of possible followers. Social competition of this kind will at least ensure the survival of religious fundamentalist groups. However, with predominant liberal values widely accepted, the fundamentalists will struggle to establish their beliefs and traditions as the dominant beliefs and traditions. In other words, religious fundamentalists are not likely to successfully achieve their ends through the use of social competition as an option to deal with invidious comparisons.

#### **4.2.4 Reactionary Violence**

According to Juergensmeyer (2001:10) religion often leads to violence within a peculiar set of circumstances, usually in times when religion becomes “fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for change.” One should never forget that religious fundamentalists are considered to be backwards by other social groups and, therefore, religious fundamentalists occupy the lower ranks of the social hierarchy. Of course, like any other social group, they strive to improve their position as a group on this hierarchy. A successful attempt will lead to higher status and, as a result, enhanced self-esteem for group members. But religious fundamentalists find themselves in a peculiar position. Although they are viewed as backwards they are reluctant to modernise in order to enhance their status and improve their social standing as a group. Thus, religious fundamentalists find themselves in the lower rankings of the social hierarchy – being considered backwards by most other social groups - while being unwilling to change their ways. Yet, they still strive to become superior to other social groups.

According to social identity theory an actual or perceived threat to the group and its members can inspire aggression and sometimes violent conflict. Castells (2004:24) is of opinion that religious fundamentalists “long for the security of traditional values and institutions rooted in God’s eternal truth.” However, these traditional values have consistently, and in most parts successfully, been challenged by the secular world. Science and liberal values have slowly but surely replaced these traditional values as the dominant values of society. This has led religious fundamentalists “to perceive themselves a minority under threat of destruction by secular society” (Herriot, 2007:36). They are, in essence, struggling for survival in the secular world and their options to do so seem to be limited. But there is another feature that should be taken into account, for the ends of the fundamentalists are much more ambitious than simply ensuring survival.

Religious fundamentalists want to establish their traditional values and religious beliefs as the dominant values and beliefs. In their minds, there are no doubts that they adhere to



the one authentic faith and that their beliefs and way of living should be adopted by everyone else. Religious fundamentalists are actively pursuing their utopia. Coupled with the belief that their actions are executed, and therefore justified, in the name of God their means to achieve the ends are often violent. According to Herriot (2007:16) this specific kind of religious fundamentalist believes that “God’s rules permit, nay require, violent assault on the secular world.” This type of violent assault on the secular world often comes as a surprise to the targets as it is usually a one-sided attack on an enemy that did not agree to conflict.

But, yet again, there is a feature that should be accounted for. According to social identity theory a successful attack on the enemy brings a sense of victory and power and also enhances group identification and self-esteem (Herriot, 2007:15). By surprising their enemy with a calculated attack the religious fundamentalist is certain of a victory and the feeling of superiority that comes with it. A victorious social group gains status, its group members gain enhanced self-esteem and both gain superiority in relation to the out-group(s). Reactionary violence as an option to deal with invidious comparisons thus becomes an effective way of establishing the relevance of the social group, improving social status, and enhancing the self-esteem of group members.

#### **4.2.5 Complete Withdrawal**

A possible fifth option was discussed in section 3.6. This option, based on the Amish example, promotes complete withdrawal from the secular world to establish a separate community who do not compare or compete with any other social group. A group who pursues this strategy will live in complete seclusion without interference *from* the secular world and without interfering *in* the secular world. The Amish, a religious fundamentalist group, has shown that this option can be pursued successfully. However, if the fundamentalist group wants to establish God’s kingdom on earth this option will not be preferred. The same is true for religious fundamentalist groups who want to establish their relevancy as a social group in the social hierarchy. This option will only be preferred by fundamentalist groups who are content with accentuating their own superiority by means of segregation and not by the conventional means of comparing and

competing with other social groups. Thus, complete withdrawal can be a viable option for some religious fundamentalist groups, but definitely not for others.

### **4.3 The Expected Future**

In the previous sections options for dealing with invidious comparisons were evaluated according to their viability for religious fundamentalist social groups. It should be mentioned again that although the main focus of this study fell on Christianity and Christian fundamentalism, the conclusions drawn can be generalised to include the wider religious fundamentalist community within the monotheistic framework.

It is now necessary to return to two very important questions mentioned earlier. One, how can religious fundamentalist groups function best in a world where most other social groups do not share the same understanding? And two, can violent attacks be avoided in the process? Although there are a host of options available to these groups it was established that the means and ends of different fundamentalist groups will play a very important role in deciding which option(s) they are likely to pursue.

For those religious fundamentalist groups who are content with a low ranking on a social hierarchy based on secular standards, there are a host of options to consider in order to effectively deal with invidious comparisons. These fundamentalist groups can become socially creative by either changing the rankings or changing the out-group. They can also consider engaging in social competition to win the hearts and minds of possible followers. Complete withdrawal is another option that should be considered by these specific fundamentalist groups. Although these options are unlikely to replace secular values and norms with religious values and norms, religious fundamentalists will at least be able to ensure survival for the time being.

However, the only option remotely viable for religious fundamentalists who have aspirations to move up in the social hierarchy as a legitimate and relevant social group superior to most other social groups – while also having won the recognition as a superior group by other social groups – are to resort to violence. Violent attacks may be the only

effective tool to grab the attention of the world, to let them know that religious fundamentalist groups are not only still existent, but are indeed a force to be reckoned with.

Within this context it is fairly safe to argue that religious fundamentalists will remain a social force that should be accounted for. According to Armstrong (2004:273) in the 1960s and 1970s religious fundamentalists within the monotheistic framework “felt that their backs were to the wall and that they would have to fight in order to survive.” These feelings often evoked violent reactions and, as already mentioned in the first chapter, terrorist attacks took on a religious nature in the 1980s. Unfortunately this is the era we live in and it has not seen its end by a long way. Sporadic violent attacks aimed at the secular world can be expected as long as religious fundamentalists are widely considered to be backwards. Armstrong (2004:201) explains it well when she writes: “It is important that we understand the dread and anxiety that lie at the heart of the fundamentalist vision, because only then will we begin to comprehend its passionate rage, its frantic desire to fill the void with certainty, and its conviction of ever-encroaching evil.”

This study attempted to describe the ‘hard-to-understand phenomenon’ that is religious fundamentalism within the context of sacred texts and absolute truths, and social identity theory. It is quite unfortunate when a conclusion is reached that the rejection of backward groups by secular society inspires reactionary violence on innocent bystanders. Yet, this is the conclusion that was arrived at. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the secular state has been widely accepted as the governing body. However, over the last few decades secular governments have been forced to deal with unpredictable, sporadic violent attacks often targeting important landmarks and claiming innocent lives. The actions of religious fundamentalist groups are most definitely a major security concern, both external and internal, for the modern secular state. The unpredictability of their attacks and the devastating consequences has rendered the secular state helpless against these forces. And it is indeed a growing concern.

Religions within the monotheistic framework, more specifically Christianity and Islam, are alive and growing. Currently about 32% of the world population belongs to the Christian faith - gaining 25 million adherents annually, while 19% are Muslim (Religious Tolerance, 2009). Both these religions are expanding into the South – developing countries - with some vigor, especially Christianity. According to Jenkins (2001:11) “many Southern societies will develop a powerful Christian identity in culture and politics.” Jenkins (2001:7) also argues that Southern Christians “are far more conservative in terms of both beliefs and moral teachings.” Radical Protestant sects and traditionalist Roman Catholic churches have made the most progress (Jenkins, 2001:7). This should raise some awareness as southern secular governments will eventually have to face up to the pressures of these conservative Christian forces. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2009) will release a comprehensive study on the global growth rates of both Christianity and Islam in 2010. These statistics are sure to provide a more complete picture of the growing religious forces in the secular world.

It is now up to the secular world, dominated by secular standards, to face this uncomfortable fact and find ways to effectively deal with religious fundamentalist groups in a manner that would ensure peaceful means and ends. In this sense it is important to sufficiently address questions such as: How can the secular world convince religious fundamentalists to stop using violence as a means to an end? How can religious fundamentalists be incorporated into mainstream society without having to face feelings of backwardness and inferiority? But if, and how the secular world can achieve this, is surely an avenue for future research.

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